



오크지만 찬양해

이정민
판타지 장편소설

1

몬스터

Praise the Orc!

– 오크지만 찬양해! –

- Volume 3 -

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CHAPTER 51

FREEDOM

The Thawing Balhae Clan's members decreased. Both the incident in Arnin and the unveiling of their plot in Chesswood had severely hurt them. Even the public opinion on the Internet was against them. The name of 'Thawing Balhae' was now the subject of ridicule.

So it was like this.

Crockta and Jeremy even criticized them for being boring.

"Brother, are these the last ones?" Jeremy asked as he tied up the last Thawing Balhae member with a rope.

"It seems so."

Crockta nodded. They had raided a building belonging to the Thawing Balhae Clan, and this was its last room. It was the third city hit after Chesswood. Jeremy's captive struggled as his body started to be bound.

He begged, "Please don't! How will I grow? I have money, so please...!"

"Shut up, this guy."

Jeremy hit his back. Jeremy kept hitting him as the man kept twisting without end.

Crockta shrugged. The user seemed like someone who worked hard to raise his character. His equipment was advanced and he was relatively strong in the clan. But Crockta and Jeremy were stronger.

Jeremy continued by kicking the man's face. He flew away, bleeding at the mouth. The man struggled to catch his breath and fell limp. Jeremy bound his body. Jeremy finished with the man and rose from his spot, wiping the sweat from his brow.

"Phew. There sure are a lot of them."

All of the Thawing Balhae clan members were wriggling on the ground like worms behind Crockta and Jeremy. The door opened, revealing the messenger that Derek had dispatched.

“Thanks for the good work.”

Crockta didn’t know how, but Derek said that he had made a big profit here. According to the man, Derek had arranged to gain control of the city simply by pushing the Thawing Balhae clan out of the area. Crockta didn’t ask about the contents.

“Hey, is Boss doing well?” Jeremy asked. The man glanced at Jeremy and nodded. “Of course.”

“It’s been a long time. Tell him I will return with a gift.”

“I understand. Boss Derek has also prepared a gift for you.”

“A gift from Boss? Should I be expectant? What is it?”

“I don’t know the details.”

Jeremy approached the man and placed a hand on his shoulder.

“The management of those cursed people is going well right?”

“Yes, don’t worry. Most of them have already been taken to the stars.”

When a user’s character disappeared completely, the NPCs expressed it as being ‘taken by the stars’. Most of the Thawing Balhae Clan members had been forced to delete their characters, create new ones, or quit the game.

“What is the next destination?” Crockta asked.

The man spoke respectfully to Crockta, “Crockta, there are no more.”

“Why?”

“The movements of the Thawing Balhae Clan have disappeared, and the crowd has dispersed. They seemed to have disbanded.”

“...I see.”

“Yes. The Thawing Balhae Clan is over.”

The dissolution of Thawing Balhae had occurred in no time. Their bases and workplaces had been raided, so it was no wonder that they had disbanded.

Crockta walked to the window. The clan members were on the ground, but he didn't care and stepped all over them. When he reached the window, he could see the blue sky.

He opened the window and a cool breeze floated into the room. Crockta stared at the sky outside. He hadn't expected that his revenge for Lenox would come to an end so quickly, so soon. It was an unknown feeling.

“Is it really the end?”

“Yes, Crockta. Nothing is being hidden from you.”

Crockta suddenly looked at the man's face. The man continued speaking, “Maybe this is the inevitable result. You and Jeremy have cut off their limbs. This much is great.”

“I see.”

Jeremy whistled. “Brother, congratulations. In the end, didn't you get your revenge?”

Crockta shrugged.

Revenge, had he really done it? He couldn't catch Grom the traitor or the Thawing Balhae clan master who had allied with the NPC noble. If the clan was disbanded, then it would be more difficult to track them down. Crockta laughed bitterly.

It was only a half revenge. But the Thawing Balhae Clan had lost more than half. They didn't care about what Crockta lost, so their situation was worthless to him.

For the time being, it would be good to rest. But this didn't mean it was a complete end. On the day that they met again under the skies of Elder Lord, they would realize that the orcs had come back for revenge.

“Derek has this gift for you.”

The man handed over a piece of paper to Crockta with a city and address written on it. He also saw something that looked like a password. It seemed to be the contact method.

“If you want to chase the remnants of the clan, then use this. This is the method to contact an information guild. That is all we can do for you.”

“Thank you.”

Crockta put the piece of paper away. Anyway, this was a mutually benefiting deal. The rest was up to Crockta alone.

“Good job,” Crockta told Jeremy.

He laughed. “Brother really gave went through a lot of trouble. Your revenge, you did a pretty good job.”

“Are you going back to Derek?”

“Of course, my original position is beside Boss.”

“I see.”

Crockta walked over to Jeremy and quietly whispered in Jeremy’s ears, “You should be careful of Derek.”

“Huh?”

“Hounds will only be raised when they can be controlled. If they try to break the collar, then they will be silenced.”

“What are you talking about?”

“It doesn’t hurt to be careful.”

Crockta glanced somewhere else. The messenger sent by Derek was watching them whisper together. Crockta smiled and moved away. Then he hit Jeremy’s shoulder.

“Bul’tar! You went through a lot of trouble. Stay alive until we meet the next time. “

“Is this a parting? How depressing.”

“I’ll see you again someday.”

“Yes. Brother, come and see me in Anail one day.”

Jeremy stretched out his hand, as if he wanted a handshake, before stopping and grinning. He pushed out his fist in the orc manner.

“In fact, I wanted to try this once.”

Crockta grinned and bumped fists with Jeremy.

“Bul’tar! Is this right?”

“Wrong. There is nothing in your voice. More strength. Bul’tar!”

“Pfff, how funny. Yes, Bul’tar.” Jeremy laughed and dropped his fist. “Brother, will you be leaving now?”

Crockta nodded.

“That’s right. I should go.”

Jeremy slung his arm over Crockta and said to the man, “Take care of cleaning up this place. Brother, I’ll send you off.”

“Yes.”

Crockta and Jeremy left the room.

As they headed to the entrance of the building, they passed by Thawing Balhae Clan members struggling to get rid of their ropes. Some had already terminated their connection. Crockta and Jeremy smiled as they saw them.

They reached the entrance and exchanged glances. The two people firmly grasped hands. Their farewell wasn’t long, with only a short handshake and eye contact. They hit each other’s shoulders and turned in different directions before setting off, knowing that they would someday meet again.



Jeremy saw off Crockta and entered Thawing Balhae's building again. This place was now Derek's asset, and Derek's crew was cleaning up the remnants of the Clan.

The man that Derek sent came over to him saying, "Jeremy."

"Huh?"

"Here, a letter from the boss."

"A letter?"

The man handed a white envelope to Jeremy. As always, the white envelope was sealed with red candle wax that had Derek's mark on it. Jeremy opened it and whistled. The candle wax fell down.

"Hrmm... What do I have to do this time...?"

For a moment, Jeremy doubted his eyes. The contents were unexpected. He was about to open his mouth and say, 'what the hell is this' when he stopped.

'You should be careful of Derek.'

He recalled Crockta's voice. Even though he had yet to fully understand it, Jeremy's instincts prompted him to cover his face with a mask of calmness. Jeremy suppressed his wildly beating heart and smiled. He didn't expose his agitation and acted like he had expected it.

"Indeed..."

His voice trembled. 'Calm down, Jeremy.'

"As expected from Boss. He is thorough. Isn't that right?"

"....."

"The risk factor needs to be removed. That has always been the case."

Jeremy laughed. He barely folded up the letter with his stiff hands. He placed the letter

back in the envelope and put it away, still smiling. His face was smiling, but he was quickly analyzing the situation.

The letter that Derek sent to Jeremy was simple.

[Kill Crockta.]

Jeremy knew Derek well. This was a way of testing his subordinates. He shouldn't show the slightest hesitation or confusion. He had to be a loyal dog, and one that refused to hunt would instantly be put down.

'But why? Boss, why me?'

Jeremy realized it the moment he asked the question. He couldn't help laughing.

'I see.'

The order to kill Crockta. Derek already had his suspicions and doubts, seeing right through Jeremy. Derek required thorough obedience. Jeremy had previously dealt with those who rejected Derek's orders as traitors.

Thus, Jeremy was able to understand Derek's decision. With this type of mindset, he wouldn't be able to complete the many injustices that Derek would order him to do in the future.

'Indeed, Boss is really great.' Jeremy thought. Derek could see through Jeremy's mind that he didn't even know himself.

But at the same time, he was offended. He handled everything as Derek's direct subordinate. He did it without any doubts. He thought that he was a special subordinate to Derek. He hoped to be more than just a dog.

It was his pride.

"Hey, Brother. Did Boss say anything to you?" Jeremy asked.

The man was confused, but Jeremy just grinned. "If I show any sign of surprise or objection, kill me immediately?"

".....!"

The man's eyes widened. The moment he was about to retreat, Jeremy's sword pierced his neck, blood spraying out.

"Somehow, your neck is stiff like an old man's."

"Cough..."

The man collapsed.

Derek's other subordinates surrounded Jeremy. Their momentum was overwhelming. They were strong.

Jeremy chuckled.

There was one thing that couldn't be predicted. Jeremy's body moved like the wind, one of the assailants collapsing in his wake. As the enemy's formation collapsed, Jeremy knocked them down in turn, slain without any resistance. Jeremy's eyes were cold as he cut the neck of the last assailant.

Jeremy was very strong. He became even stronger as he fought with Crockta.

This fact was beyond Derek's expectations. It was natural. Jeremy had been with Crockta for a while, not someone else. Derek's prediction was ruined by the orc warrior. Crockta was an unpredictable variable who kept changing the surroundings.

"If I'm with that orc brother, I have to be stronger."

It was necessary in order to stand beside such a reckless man. Jeremy took a deep breath and walked over to the window. He trampled on the cursed bodies and the dead ones without any care. As he reached the window, he could see the high, blue sky.

Jeremy stared at that long expanse.

"This is why that orc brother was standing here before."

After ending the Thawing Balhae Clan, Crockta had walked over to the window and to stare at the sky. Jeremy could now understand why.

"The sky is true."

Derek had abandoned him, and he had also abandoned Derek. The shackles holding him were released. Both Derek and the back alleys of Anail, restraints that had dominated his whole life, were now gone.

The world was far wider than he had ever known, now that his chains had been cut off.

Jeremy opened his arms. The wind blowing from outside wound around him.

Now he would be chased by Derek. He would also need to find a job. The only thing he knew how to do was use the sword. He had no family or friends. He was thrown into this world with only a sword.

“A person who doesn’t belong anywhere...”

Destiny was returned to his hands. There might be many enemies in the future.

Freedom.

Jeremy closed his eyes.

...Ecstasy.

CHAPTER 52

YIYU'S REVENGE (1)

Ian disconnected and emerged from the capsule. He contemplated on his play last night.

It was a long journey. He started at Orcrox, which was on the edge of the continent. It passed through Anail, Arnin, and Chesswood to the centre of the continent. He was now stronger than anyone who wasn't a ranker.

He also got revenge on the Thawing Balhae Clan. There would be a little delay as he searched for Hyunchul and the clan leader, but the crippling blow to the Thawing Balhal Clan had already been dealt.

He could now work on the reason why he began playing this game. The reason he started playing the game was for his sister Jung Yiyu. Her character was in the center of the continent, at one of the starting points for elves.

"That is the reason why I am playing the game, for Yiyu..."

Ian hummed before suddenly stopping.

".....!"

This wasn't something he normally did.

He had hummed unconsciously because Jeremy was always making noises beside him. It was just like Iron, F4 the roleplaying group, and the orcs who played the game. Meeting all of those people had changed Ian in real life.

Ian started laughing. Change. It wasn't a bad feeling.

He stretched, afraid of becoming unhealthy after spending so much time in Elder Lord. He needed to move his body properly. Ian slowly moved. By the way, his body was softer than he thought. No, rather, it seemed more flexible than before.

Ian cocked his head. Somehow, strength was overflowing in him. What was this? Ian

looked down at his hands before suddenly falling face-down to the ground. He put weight on both hands in a push-up stance and then slowly lifted his lower body from the ground.

Ian's mouth dropped open. It was a success. This type of body movement was called a Planche. He supported his body with only his arms and formed a straight position in the air, like Superman.

He hadn't thought that it would be possible after not exercising for a while. However, it actually seemed easier than before. Ian got up and pondered over his body. Maybe it was thanks to Elder Lord.

There was a similar reaction as one conducted image training, so maybe Elder Lord had that effect on the body as well.

Ian showered and left home. After dropping off some food at the café for Han Yeori and Yoo Sooyeon, he headed to Yiyu's university. It was lunch time so he thought he would buy her something delicious.

He contacted her and told her to wait in front of the cafeteria.

"Oppa."

"You came?"

They entered the cafeteria.

Ian ordered a set of sushi and noodles. Yiyu loved sushi. When she was young, she had been impressed by the classic cartoon, 'Mister Sushi King', and dreamed of being a chef. Of course, she gave it up after realizing that she had no talent in cooking.

"Why did you come here all of a sudden? And you're buying the meal as well?"

"It isn't sudden, I've bought you a lot of meals."

"You haven't done it lately, so I thought you didn't care about your little sister anymore. Have you been busy meeting that pretty sister?"

Ian smiled and poked Yiyu's forehead with his fingers. She frowned.

“Does it hurt?”

“It hurts,” Yiyu complained, and moving her gaze to her phone. She seemed to be messaging someone. Ian touched his chin.

This was good enough.

One year ago, Yiyu had been awkward with Ian. It had been seven years.

As soon as he became an adult, he received an exemption from military service due to having a minor dependent on him. He was then sent to the foreign troops through Baek Hanho’s recommendation.

He sent and received letters, but he hadn’t been able to communicate with her properly due to the circumstances of his unit, the time difference, and security issues. Yiyu was left at a relative’s home and Ian supported her living expenses and tuition. Yiyu wasn’t bullied, but she also didn’t receive any love.

When Ian was discharged and returned to Korea last year, the 13 year old child had already become an adult.

Yiyu was unfamiliar with Ian.

She told her brother, whom she hadn’t met in seven years, that she would get a job as soon as she graduated high school so that he didn’t need to worry about her. It was regrettable, considering their past relationship, so he just told her to go to the school that she wanted to go to.

His father had always said to him,

‘Mother and Father are busy, so you have to protect your little sister. A brother and sister should be closer with each other than with their parents. You have to depend on each other until you die. It is the deepest family connection. So... You must protect Yiyu. I believe in you.’

Then there was his parents’ funeral, who had died without even leaving a will. Ian didn’t cry. He smiled and made a pledge towards his father’s photo. ‘I won’t let you down.’

He sometimes doubted if he was meeting his father’s expectations, but the resolution

of that time still remained in his chest.

“Oppa, why are you smiling like that?”

“.....”

“I-It hurts!”

Sometimes that resolution was shaken. The meal arrived and Yiyu started eating the sushi.

“How’s school?”

“Good.”

“And your course feels right?”

“No... I don’t know.” Yiyu sighed. “Oppa, sometimes I wonder about my dream. I thought that I’d find it in the economics department, but I don’t know anymore.”

“Wasn’t it to become the sushi king?”

“Ah, not that.”

“You should do what you want.”

“I can’t always do what I want. I need talent.”

“Talent?”

“Yes. For example, even if all soccer players practice, that doesn’t mean they will be like Pele, Ronaldo, Maradona, and Messi.

Ian laughed. Yiyu raised her eyebrows. “What, what?”

“There is no need to be the best.”

“Then?”

“There are plenty of soccer players out there. You don’t have to be the best. Even if you

can't play, you can open a soccer school and coach. Or you can open a neighborhood gym."

"I see..."

"You should just be happy as you do what you want."

Yiyu looked at Ian with a strange expression before going back to swallowing her sushi. She gasped, "Ah, wasabi, wasabi. Spicy."

Ian handed her some water which calmed her down as she drank the water.

"But Oppa, what if I don't know what I like?"

"You don't know?"

"Yeah, I don't know. Under these circumstances, it looks like I just have to live and die."

"It'll be okay."

"You always say that it'll be okay."

"If you want to live roughly, than you should just do it. No one will scold you."

"You scold me for my failing grades."

"That's a formality."

"Then I'll keep doing it in the future, okay?"

"No."

"Yes, yes."

"No no no."

"Che."

The two concentrated on their meal for a while. It was delicious. Ian decided to come here with his part time workers next time. Ian cut to the chase.

“You, how is Elder Lord?”

“Huh?”

Ian coughed. “Hmm, I’m actually...”

“I quit.”

“Very high... what?”

“I quit Elder Lord.”

Ian looked at Yiyu. She didn’t even look at Ian as she slurped her udon. “I won’t play anymore.”

Ian hesitated because her face seemed really determined. “Why all of a sudden?”

“I just did.”

Ian recalled a childhood memory.

Whenever something bad happened, Yiyu would stay quiet at home. Ian would ask what happened, and she wouldn’t reply. Ian always had to coax the details out of her. If he kept asking, then she would eventually confess.

As Ian looked at her glum expression, he couldn’t help asking, “What’s going on?”

“I just don’t want to do it.”

“Tell me.”

“.....”

As soon as Yiyu closed her mouth, Ian grabbed her favorite tuna from the sushi set.

“Ah, what the?”

“You can’t eat until you speak.”

“Ah, why? How petty. Gimme.”

“Eat.”

“Okay, I understand.”

Ian gave her the tuna back.

“It’s just scary.”

“Scary?”

“Well...”

Yiyu was scared and weak. As she had told her friends, she had died to a rabbit. Therefore, she became a mystic to obtain spirits and carefreely roam around the world. One day, she encountered a group of users.

They were high level players that were normally not seen in the beginner’s area. They noticed that she was shearing sheep alone with her spirits and approached. They told her that they were high level users, and that they would help her raise her level.

Yiyu rejected, but they kept at it, quickly becoming angry at her clear refusal.

Before attacking her, they exclaimed, “Ah, fuck. This bitch must have spent a lot of money on her customization. Does she think she’s a real elf or something?”

Yiyu ran away as they laughed and chased her, as if they were hunting deer. Her spirits resisted, but they were eventually sent back to the spirit world, leaving Yiyu to fend for herself. Her assimilation rate was only 10%, so she didn’t feel a lot of pain. However, after being tied up like a hunted animal, she didn’t want to play Elder Lord anymore.

“I’m so sad about my poor kids being attacked,” Yiyu said. She called the spirits her kids. “At any rate, I don’t want to play anymore because there are many strange people. I apologize for forcing Oppa to play and then quitting.”

“Why are you sorry? It’s okay.”

“Oppa shouldn’t play as well. Elder Lord is too tough. Don’t play that tough game and remain a café boss.”

Ian laughed. His sister didn't seem to know that he was the toughest person around.

"Where were you?"

"Was it Maillard? Oppa, this is delicious. I want more."

"I'll go."

He ordered more sushi for Yiyu.

Ian remembered the name Maillard. He also got a description of her attackers' appearances and some other information from Yiyu. The only reason she told him all this was because he had added more tuna sushi to the plate.

Maillard was a city of elves located a little further from where Crockta currently was. Unlike Arnin, it was a place where other species were free to enter. Elves were able to choose from a variety of starting points, unlike the orcs. Maillard was a favorite starting point among beginners.

He would show them the wrath of an orc warrior.

Ian laughed.

"Yiyu?"

Someone suddenly called out her name. Ian raised his head.

Yiyu replied, "Uh, Yunji."

"Wow, I didn't expect to see you here. Are you eating lunch?"

"Yes. You as well?"

"Yes. It has been a while."

It was Yiyu's friend. She glanced at Ian. "Is he your boyfriend?"

"No, my brother."

"Brother? Really?"

She looked at both Ian and Yiyu. “You do look alike. Hello, I am Yiyu’s friend, Jung Yunji.”

“Hello. I am Yiyu’s older brother.”

Ian greeted her. He spoke politely since she was Yiyu’s friend. She came with another party, so a group of girls were waiting for her. Jung Yunji said goodbye to Yiyu and turned away. But Jung Yunji looked strangely familiar to Ian.

Her face was familiar. Her grouchy face complaining to Ian seemed to pop into his head for some reason. Ian frowned. Who was it? Where did he see her?

“Ah. I hate carrots.”

Yiyu spat out a piece of carrot as she ate the udon.

Carrot. Carrot...

‘Bah, will Ian’s strength make a difference?’

“.....!”

‘Will it turn carrots into beef? You would be a wealthy merchant.’

Those words suddenly popped into his head. Ian looked back. He caught Jung Yunji’s eyes as her friend nagged her.

“.....?”

She looked embarrassed by Ian’s gaze and turned slightly pink. She shyly bowed her head and tucked her hair behind her ears.

“Why are you staring, are you interested in her?” Yiyu asked sharply. Ian shook his head and turned forward again.

“No.”

“Then what is it?”

“She looks familiar.”

“Hrm...”

Yiyu made a questioning sound, but Ian just put the sushi in his mouth. It was obvious why. He actually met her in reality, so he couldn't help feeling goosebumps.

But somehow, it felt like the back of his head was stinging.

CHAPTER 53

YIYU'S REVENGE (2)

Crockta entered the city.

Unlike the time when he was at Arnin, he wasn't stopped at the entrance.

This was a big city. Unlike last time, Crockta truly felt admiration. Elves flew in the sky on pegasus, and a giant spirit walked around with an elf on its shoulder. The buildings were big and beautiful, with the architecture obviously being designed for the purpose of art.

This place was the city of elves, Maillard!

This city was considered to be the cradle of the elf users. A variety of jobs existed, and the level of the surrounding hunting area wasn't high, so they could start with ease. It was like heaven compared to Orcrox Fortress.

That was the problem.

Crockta shook his head. This was a very well organized place. Here, the elves would run on comfortable roads without knowing any hardships. If their bodies were comfortable, then their minds would weaken!

"Weak elves...!"

Crockta muttered with some pride. However, his eyes were attracted to the body of a beautiful elf passing by. He frantically shook his head. He needed to regain his spirit.

"Warriors don't need women."

Pain was what made a warrior stronger. He shouldn't lose sight of that just for something temporarily sweet. In order to restore his mindset, he hummed the orc's song.

"Warriors have no need for a woman..."

By the way, something was strange. Every time he passed by, the residents were staring at Crockta. Orcs weren't rare in this place. This was a big city, so orcs occasionally passed by. The question was soon solved by another orc.

“.....!”

“.....!”

Crockta suddenly encountered an orc on the street. The orc's eyebrows twitched as he discovered Crockta, promptly approaching him...

He was an orc warrior. Tattoos were engraved on his face and body, and Crockta could feel the strength coming from him. He extended his fist.

“You are alive, Crockta!”

“.....?”

How did the orc know his name?

“How?”

“An orc with a black bandana, and the tattoos of honor. Your reputation is spreading all over the continent! An honorable warrior! Bul'tar!”

Crockta bumped the orc's fist.

“I am the orc Purast! I really admire you.”

“It is nice to meet you Purast. I'm not such a great orc.”

“What are you talking about? Rescuing people on the Arnin Plains, and revealing the hypocrisy of the Arnin politicians! You fought for the innocent victims of Chesswood!” He hit his chest. “In an era where many warriors have forgotten the laws of years past, you are a warrior worthy of admiration.”

“Well. I don't deserve such praise.”

Crockta nodded. Then he heard whispers around him.

‘Crockta. That is the famous orc? The orc of justice? The honorary citizen of Arnin and Chesswood’s hero?’

Crockta’s shoulders went up. He had become stronger and his achievement points had also increased tremendously.

[Status Window]

‘Person Pursuing the Pinnacle’ Crockta, Orc Warrior

Level: 39

Achievement Points: 76510

Assimilation: 80%.

Abilities:

Orc Warrior’s Destructive Power (Rare)

Orc Warrior’s Recovery Power (Rare)

Leyteno’s Vigorous Greatsword Technique (Essence)

Combative Spirit (Essence)

Mind’s Eye (Special)

Tattoos of Honour (Rare)

Crushing Roar (Rare)

The highest leveled user in Elder Lord known to date was at level 60. Despite the difficult to grow nature of the game, Crockta was growing at a tremendous rate. More than 400,000 users were admitted to the ranks of the high-level users.

Furthermore, he had two Essence ranked skills that were widely known as difficult to obtain. After the bloody battle in Chesswood, Indomitable Fighting Spirit had been upgraded to Combative Spirit. The repeated swinging of the greatsword as he caught the other clan members had also upgraded the previous skill to Leyteno's Vigorous Greatsword Technique.

This didn't even mention his assimilation rate. In the former [Elder Lord Times] segment, everyone had been shocked when they discovered that Kim Dalkwang's assimilation rate was 73%. But he had 80%! If it was only looking at assimilation rate, Crockta might be at the peak in Elder Lord.

The peak! What a wonderful word!

[Your reputation has spread through the world of Elder Lord.]

[The friendliness of any NPCs you meet will increase.]

[Purast is looking at you with respect.]

Purast chuckled and admired, "I heard that you were humble and intellectual for an orc, and it really is true. Really amazing! You truly aren't an ordinary orc! Kuhaha!"

However, Crockta couldn't accept his words. "What are you saying?" Crockta spoke with a firm expression. "Orc or not, nobody else can decide such a thing. It is only you who can self-discipline yourself!"

".....!"

"Purast, the possibilities of the orcs are infinite!"

Purast looked at Crockta with surprise. That's right. He was an orc, but he had prejudices against orcs.

It was similar to how he saw humans as ambiguous, elves as weak but fast, dwarves as dexterous, and gnomes as just little bastards! He had used his own yardstick to judge the world, but his eyes were opened now that he met Crockta. He had gained

enlightenment. He felt confident, like he could do anything.

Crockta said the following, “The instructor who taught me said this: Warriors aren’t born, but created.”

“He is...” Purast replied.

“The orc warrior instructor, Lenox.”

Purast exclaimed in a low voice, “Lenox...!”

Purast had also heard of his reputation. He had become a warrior through learning under an instructor outside of Orcrox. His instructor had been a disciple of Lenox. Lenox was the warrior instructor and a true warrior.

“Lenox! I’ve heard the news. Those dirty humans...!”

“I will get revenge for him.”

“Revenge!”

“A warrior pays back each favor or act of vengeance.”

“Indeed...” Purast grabbed Crockta’s hand. “You truly are an honorable orc.”

Crockta nodded. He had to admit that he thought that he was a wonderful orc. Thus, Crockta and Purast talked for a while.

“It was an honor to meet you.”

Crockta and Purast bumped fists.

“Let’s live and see each other again. Bul’tar!”

“Bul’tar!”

Crockta parted from Purast and continued walking. He felt even prouder. The beautiful elves were staring at him. Crockta puffed up his chest.

‘Look elves, this is an orc warrior.’

“Really scary.”

“Let’s lower our eyes.”

“The orc of justice is also ugly.”

“I’m lucky that it isn’t nighttime right now.”

The elves whispered to each other as they watched Crockta.

Anyway, Crockta was here because of Yiyu. His little sister, revenge for Yiyu! If such a diabolical group appeared, it was clear that Yiyu wouldn’t be the only victim. Those people would repeat the same actions. This was because people didn’t change easily.

Suddenly, Crockta halted.

“Don’t change...”

Do people really not change? They didn’t ‘change’ easily.

At one time, he believed that people would never change. But now he knew. People changed. They could change.

“A person can be anything,” Crockta muttered.

There was a time when he madly wanted change. He thought that it wasn’t possible, so he had felt despair. But he had changed. If a person had the will, they could be who they wanted to be. That was what it meant to be a human being.

“You will also change.” Crockta would meet the ones who harassed Yiyu and rehabilitate them.

“Um...?”

Crockta stopped in his tracks.

It was a mirror shop. Mirrors were expensive things that couldn’t be easily seen in Elder Lord. There were beautiful elf females tidying up their appearance, and then the ridiculous figure of the orc behind them.

Crockta looked at his reflection in the mirror.

An orc wearing a black bandana! He wore leather armor that revealed his thick muscles and carried a huge greatsword on his back. Furthermore, many intricate tattoos were covering his entire body.

Crockta nodded. It was the very nice appearance of a warrior. However, he wanted to be even greater.

“I’ve been fighting for a while.”

He decided it was time to shop for a change.



“I am alive.”

“Ah, hello.”

The elf clerk was confused by the appearance of the customer. She operated a clothing store for various species. With the exception of elves and humans, it was a place to sell fashion items for dwarves, orcs, and gnomes.

Naturally, the orc this time was also a customer. However, this was the first time that she had ever seen an orc with tattoos all over his body and a rough appearance, as if he had just come out from the battlefields. She froze as she met his intense gaze.

“What are you looking for...?”

The orc stood in front of a mirror instead of answering. The orc touched his chin and looked at himself in the mirror for a while. He seemed to nod with satisfaction. Then he said, “Great...”

“Great...?”

“Headband.”

In the meantime, the orc Crockta had been using a bandana with the mark of the Blacksmith company. Now it was time to throw it away. He was going to buy a headband to cover the star on his forehead.

The elf clerk calmly put out a variety of headbands which were typically used by adventurers to prevent sweat from flowing down their foreheads. Crockta chose his favorite, a red headband, among the array of headbands.

“The point is that it is red. Isn’t that right?”

“Huh? Yes...”

“Give me this.”

“Three silver.”

“Yes.”

It was cheap. Crockta tied the headband at once. There was plenty of room to fit around an orc’s head.

“Isn’t it great?”

“Of course.”

The female elf didn’t say that it looked like the headband had turned red from all the blood. He looked even more evil after taking off the black bandana and donning the red headband.

“How great.”

“.....”

“Please throw this away.”

The bandana from the Blacksmith Company was thrown in the trash can. Crockta stepped out of the clothing store, now with a red headband, instead of a black bandana, covering the star on his forehead. The orc’s wild hair seemed to double his wild charm.

People glanced at Crockta.

Crockta headed to the armor store and bought a set of equipment that was more expensive than his existing leather armor. The base was made of leather, but iron

plates padded the important parts, upgrading his defense.

He also bought gauntlets and boots to protect his hands and feet, and there was also a belt where he could hang daggers.

He looked like a whole new orc. He had completely thrown off the appearance of a beginner, and now looked like a seasoned orc warrior!

Finally, he headed to the blacksmith to check if the greatsword, 'Ogre Slayer', needed any repairs. The dwarf blacksmith's eyes shone as he received it.

"This...!"

It was made of the adamantium alloy that was unique to the Golden Anvil Clan. The blacksmith could see it straight away, since only the Golden Anvil Clan could handle adamantium so skillfully. "Are you a friend of the Golden Anvil Clan?"

"I'm not. My friend is a business partner of the Golden Anvil Clan, so I received this sword."

"It was a long time ago that the orcs received weapons from the Golden Anvil Clan. Okay, I'll do it nicely. Expect it."

The dwarf got to work. After checking the greatsword, Crockta also bought a pair of daggers and two sets of leather armor in case of emergency.

He felt reborn as he carried the greatsword on his back.

He had run this far. Under Lenox, he had taken the path to become a warrior, and had been involved in various incidents after leaving Orcrox. Now he felt like he had become a true orc.

Crockta straightened his chest and walked.

This was why a big city was good. He could see many high quality equipment and goods that he hadn't seen in the many villages and cities that he had already passed. Crockta finally headed to a general store to buy potions.

".....!"

They met again. The Blacksmith Company! The Blacksmith branch in Maillard.

The man called Blacksmith would be a rich man. Branches of the Blacksmith Company were present everywhere he went. Crockta believed in the Blacksmith Company and went inside; however, he instantly turned away.

“.....!”

No, why was she here?

Crockta took a deep breath.

“Uh, Customer? Come in, come in. Don’t hesitate.” The familiar voice caught Crockta. Crockta didn’t move, but her hand grabbed his arm and started pulling. “Orc, do you need potions? Or a knife? What do you need? I sell everything, everything.”

It was Stella. The intern of the Blacksmith Company whom he sold vegetables with in Anail, Stella! Moreover, Crockta was convinced that Stella was Yiyu’s friend. Crockta was worried as he slowly turned around.

“.....?”

But Stella just cocked her head.

“What is it? Did you want to ask something? Oh, I’m sorry, but I don’t care what species you are.”

She didn’t recognize Crockta.

Ian realized why. After going through the warrior’s ritual, he had become bigger and had even gained tattoos. The present Crockta looked completely different from the orc beginner Ian. She didn’t recognize him.

How lucky. Crockta spoke in a different tone.

“Hmm hmm, I came to buy potions...”

“There are a lot of potions. Come in.”

The Blacksmith Company’s branch in Maillard was a big deal. She had ended up being

promoted. Her name badge said 'Stella, Manager'. Maybe not all of it was due to him. Crockta inwardly laughed.

Thus, Crockta tried to buy a pile of potions.

"Wait."

".....?"

"I want to ask you one thing."

Stella told Crockta. Crockta thought his identity had been discovered and flinched.

"What do potions mean to you?"

".....?"

"I am an honorable manager, Stella. I will only sell potions to adventurers who understand the value of potions."

"....."

"Now, tell me!"

Stella... No, Yunji. No. He couldn't.

Crockta turned around with saying anything.

"Uh, uh, excuse me! Aren't you buying?"

"....."

"I'll cancel it. I just wanted to try it. Here are the potions!"

"....."

"No! Discount! Discount! I'll give you a discount! Okay?"

Crockta turned back around. Thus, Crockta bought potions at a discounted price from Stella.

‘Why didn’t it work’... he heard Stella grumble.

“I’ll ask you one thing,” Crockta said in a serious tone. “Do you know any evil people who are picking on the weak in the area?”

Stella would’ve heard the rumors. She frowned at Crockta’s question. “Perhaps... are you talking about those people?”

“Those people?”

“Female users... no, there are those going after females who are cursed by the stars.”

“That’s right.”

“Why? Perhaps...”

Stella looked at the big greatsword on his back. Crockta nodded.

“I can’t let them go.”

Stella felt admiration.

“Wow, orc warrior. How amazing. Then, I will help. My friend was also hurt by them.”

She seemed to be talking about Yiyu. However, it didn’t seem like she was that close to Yiyu. What was the reason for exchanging greetings at the cafeteria?

Speaking of which, he didn’t know that much about Yiyu’s school life. He had a vague idea from the police station incident but didn’t know what she was like outside that...

It would be good to find out ore.

“Okay.”

“Then we will go when I am off from work!”

Thus, Ian and Yunji—Crockta and Stella—accompanied each other for their own purposes.

CHAPTER 54

YIYU'S REVENGE (3)

Crockta watched what Stella was doing.

She was hunting the surrounding animals with beginner's equipment. She aimed a dagger at a deer. However, she missed. It didn't move properly and just hit the air. The deer headbutted her like she was annoying, causing her to fall down.

"Euh..."

He could now believe that Yiyu died from a rabbit. This was the level of a novice user. Stella wasn't a novice; however, she was a merchant, meaning she didn't have combat skills. Furthermore, her assimilation rate was low. Unlike Ian, her head and body acted separately.

Ian realized the importance of assimilation rate. She was demonstrating motor skills that were below her original skills in reality. Her assimilation rate was 40%, meaning that only 40% of her abilities could be used. A low assimilation rate meant she wasn't properly connected with the world of Elder Lord.

In the end, the deer left. Stella got up and went to find another prey. Crockta hid in the bushes and followed her. The two of them were luring those men who were after female users. If Stella seemed like a novice user, then they would appear. Once they showed up, he would punish them. It was a very simple plan, but there were still no signs of them.

Gradually, the sky darkened. Stella spoke up, "Excuse me, should I continue?"

"....." Crockta emerged. "Let's end it here for today."

"Yes. Tomorrow is a day off so we can continue then."

They headed back towards Maillard. Light from the big city seeped over the wall. Their location was the forest outside Maillard, a hunting ground for beginners. Sometimes they encountered other beginners and greeted them. The users were amazed to see the orc.

“How is your friend?”

“Who?”

“Your friend that they attacked.”

“Ahh...” Stella nodded. “I’m not very familiar with her. Just...”

Crockta listened closely.

“Rather than a friend...”

“Rather...?”

“Not long ago, I met her brother and he is handsome.”

“.....”

“So I want to be friends with her. He also seemed interested in me. No, we greeted each other with our eyes. Isn’t that a green light? What can I do?”

Crockta nodded with a distorted expression. “Ah, yes...”

“That reminds me, I have an orc friend called Ian. Do you know him?”

Crockta shook his head. He thought that it was best to not get caught.

“Indeed, that person is a user. What about Crockta? An orc should also have relationships. Is Crockta dating anyone?”

A love relationship.

Crockta’s eyes became distant. There was someone he once loved. What was she doing now? Was she still on the battlefield surrounded by the sound of gunshots? Assault rifles and rocket launchers suited her personality.

The moment that Crockta was about to recite an epic poem about love that blossomed on the battlefield...

“Hey, isn’t this a nice picture?”

“This is the first time I’ve seen a female with an orc.”

Stella jumped. Crockta shifted his gaze. It was the appearance of three men with good equipment. Crockta immediately used Mind’s Eye.

[Mind’s Eye’s (Special) has opened.]

[They covet the female user by your side! They are stronger than average users, but garbage compared to you.]

[Cook them as you please.]

[They won’t convert with just a few words.]

[Inflict justice!]

Even the system was hoping for their punishment. Crockta felt the energy of the universe enveloping him. The revelation of the world telling him to get rid of them!

“Huhu, isn’t this orc quite ugly?”

“He’s just another orc mob that we can catch.”

“He’ll give good us experience. Kuhahaha!”

They burst out laughing.

“Girl, are you a novice?”

“Huh?”

“Play with us and we’ll boost your level. Don’t play with this scary fellow. Are you dating? Surely orcs aren’t to your taste?”

“Hey, that’s going too far.”

They sniggered again.

Crockta's fists trembled as he listened to their words. They also used such remarks to harass his sister. He recalled his father's voice,

'You must protect your little sister.'

He wasn't a god, and couldn't take care of all of Yiyu's hardships, but at the very least, he could get revenge on these guys. It was his duty.

"Girl, did you turn off dating mode?"

"Perhaps you're not satisfied with this orc?"

He wouldn't hear any more of these garbage remarks! Crockta's fist moved like it was on fire.

"Kuheeoook!"

The face of the man in front was distorted by Crockta's punch and he flew into the sky, spinning in the air and landing on the ground.

Thud!

"...Urgh!"

"What, Moore!"

They jumped. They couldn't believe their eyes.

Orcs were a strong species, that was fact. But they were stronger. Due to spending a long time leveling up and acquiring skills, they were able to hunt orcs like orcs were monsters. However, the overwhelming force that instantly took care of them was at a ranker level! This orc wasn't a typical monster or NPC, but a particularly strong one. They were stunned.

The man who was struck by Crockta's fist was not vomiting up blood on the floor.

"Your dirty mouths..."

Crockta recalled what his sister said.

“Ah fuck. This bitch must have spent a lot of money on her customization. Does she think she is a real elf?” was what they said.

Now Crockta was certain. These dog bastards had said things that were way more terrible than that. Crockta formed fists and approached them.

They backed away as they saw the huge orc in front of them. However, Crockta grabbed the neck of the one in front and held the man’s body up in the air. The opponent swung his fist to resist, but Crockta just grabbed the fist with his other hand. Then he twisted the hand that he held.

The man groaned in pain and shouted, “Wahh! I-It hurts!”

If he felt that much pain, his assimilation rate seemed to be over 50%. Crockta laughed. The Crockta headbutted him, scattering blood and teeth everywhere. Blood also splattered on Crockta’s face. Drops of blood covered the red headband that he bought. The red headband was wet from the blood, and really looked like it had been dyed in blood.

“M-Monster.”

“Monster?”

Crockta laughed and threw the guy to the ground. He walked towards the remaining person. “No.”

“Euh...”

“You are the monsters.”

The man swung his sword at Crockta, who immediately pulled out his greatsword and struck the sword in defense.

Kang!

The opponent’s sword was broken.

“.....!”

This was the Essence ranked weapon from the Golden Anvil Clan, Ogre Slayer! The strength of the sword was reinforced by Leyteno's Vigorous Greatsword Technique! The orc's strength and power!

This was the result of the combination. The man stared blankly at his broken sword. Crockta approached him. His opponent completely gave up as he stared blankly up at Crockta. The man had lost.

"Those who have been cursed by the stars."

".....!"

"I have a tool to prevent you from entering the world of Elder Lord again... but I have decided to rehabilitate you instead."

Crockta's fist flashed again. The man flew through the air.

And Stella was staring at this scene with wide eyes. She was initially confused after first meeting the men. Their equipment and atmosphere indicated they were at a much higher level than she expected. The orc NPC was strong but she thought it would be hard for him to deal with three of them at once.

But the orc had swept through all of them like the wind. The men were now trembling and trying to get away from the orc. Great power! Maybe he was a named ranking NPC!

Stella instinctively thought that she had to join hands with this orc. Her merchant's instincts were telling her that she should make a connection with this man. This was an opportunity. However, she couldn't speak as Crockta gathered the men and beat them up in turn, so she just watched from behind.

Crockta subdued the men and gagged them in order to prevent their suicide. After removing all of their weapons, he tied them up with rope.

"Hup hup! Hup hup!"

"Ufff!"

"Be quiet." Crockta formed a fist.

"....."

It became silent. The orc's fierce face looked down at them. It was nighttime. The moonlight shining through dark night cast clear shades on his face. He looked like an evil spirit.

"I think that all orcs... No, I believe in the possibilities of every person."

"....."

"...Hup hup."

"Hup..."

"I mean... I believe that everyone can change. This orc believes that trash like you can become socially acceptable people after receiving enlightenment. In other words, I might be called an optimistic orc."

"Hup...!"

"Hup hup."

"....."

"Quiet. Do you want to be stopped from entering this world again?"

"....."

"....."

"....."

"That's right."

Crockta turned towards Stella. Stella discovered that the fires of madness were burning in Crockta's eyes.

"Look. They are quiet."

"Yes..."

"The rehabilitation has begun. Kilkilkil."

Stella thought, 'Dangerous. This orc, his eyes are...!'

"They dare to speak such dirty words to my sister... No, harassing other people... I can't allow it." Crockta tied the three people together and started dragging them towards Maillard. "Stella, thank you again. I'll express my gratitude later."

"Huh?"

"I have to go rehabilitate them."

Crockta then walked towards the city lights of Maillard. The three men groaned as they were dragged along the ground.

Stella stared at him and thought of Nietzsche's words, 'If you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss will gaze back.'

She hoped that those guys would survive the abyss that was the orc Crockta and be rehabilitated safely.



Crockta brought the men to a strange place. It was Maillard's back alley. It was like a deserted city.

Was everyone here killed by mice? Of course, that wasn't possible. Rather, the men wanted to be killed. However, this orc was familiar with those cursed by the stars and users. He tied and gagged them to prevent death and resurrection.

"If you try to do something stupid, I'll hand you over to someone who specializes in this."

"....."

"Nod like you understand."

The men nodded. Their characters and equipment were a great asset when converted into cash. They could earn a huge amount of money for it. They couldn't just let it fly away.

"I know that you aren't actually bad people," The orc said in a loud voice. The men

were confused. Why was the orc saying all of a sudden?

“Take a look at that.”

The orc pointed to a corner of the alley. There was a house-like structure made of wooden planks. It wouldn't be strange to call it a doghouse. There were children inside, children of the slums. Dark parts existed, even in a bustling city like Maillard. Rather, the light actually cast the darkness deeper into the shadows.

Soon, they could hear the conversation from inside the shack.

“Yuri, is it cold?”

“Yes... Brother.”

“Put this on.”

“Brother?”

“I'm not cold.”

It wasn't like a normal children's conversation. It seemed like the older brother had given his sister his coat. The boy was a child who wasn't even 10 years old yet. The boy's legs trembled, but he stood strong in front of his sister.

“Eat this.”

“Bread? Where did you get it?”

“I worked hard and an uncle gave it to me.”

“Really?”

The body of the boy who replied was extremely thin. The girl looked at her brother as she gnawed on a little bit of the bread. The girl stopped when she heard a growling sound from her brother's stomach. The boy gestured to eat, like it was okay. The girl eventually ate all the bread.

She smiled widely and said, “Delicious.”

“Once I am bigger, I will make more money and buy you something even more delicious.”

“Even more delicious?”

“Do you know about pizza?”

“Pizza?”

“Yes. On a piece of flat bread, things like meat, vegetables, and cheese are placed...”

“Wahhhh.”

“It’s delicious.”

“Really?”

“I’ll buy it for you.”

“Yes!”

Crockta glanced at the three men. They were quietly gazing at the scene while tied up and gagged.

“You.”

Crockta released one of the men from his restraints.

“.....?”

“If you run, then it is over for the two of them.”

“.....”

“Answer me.”

“Yes, yes.”

“Then,” Crockta pulled out a gold coin from his pocket, “give this to the children.”

“.....?”

“Give it. And talk to them.”

The man nodded at Crockta’s fearsome expression. Then he walked over to the children. He didn’t know what was going on but it couldn’t be helped. The children hid in the shack at the appearance of a strange man.

“Excuse me... kids?”

“.....”

“I won’t hurt you, so will you come out for a second?”

The boy stuck out his head. His eyes were wary.

“That...” The man extended the shining gold coin. The child’s eyes widened.

“.....?”

“I’m giving it to you.” The man grabbed the hesitant child’s hand and forcibly handed it over. He then looked into the shadow of the alley where the orc was. But it didn’t look that dark here.

“Why...?” The boy’s eyes trembled. This gold would be enough for him and his sister to survive for two months.

“This isn’t my gift...”

“Thank you.”

The boy bowed his head. Whether the reason was sympathy or something else, the boy knew how important money was. Charity was fine for himself and his sister.

“.....”

“I don’t know why you did this, but I really appreciate it. I’m not in a situation where I can refuse this...”

The boy bowed his head several times. The man didn’t know what to do and just

scratched his cheek.

“That...”

“Really, thank you!”

The girl emerged because of the fuss. The boy made the girl bow.

“Brother...?”

“Say hello.”

“Yes...?”

“Say thank you.”

“Yes. Thank you...”

“Thank you!”

What was this? The man felt an unknown sense of shame and wanted to leave this place. “I-I am going.”

“Wait a minute.” The boy grabbed the hem of his clothing. “Thank you. I will never forget this. Your name...”

“.....”

The man looked at the boy, whose eyes were watery with tears. The man had never seen such light in another’s eyes before. The man couldn’t look anymore and shifted his gaze.

“Kid.”

“Yes.”

“That...” He chose to speak but he didn’t know what to say. “That... It might be hard...”

“.....”

“...If you work hard, a good day will come.”

It was the best that he could say. The man also hadn't lived an easy life. It was tough and he had endured many moments as an adult where he wanted to cry.

The boy closed his mouth and nodded. Then he energetically replied, “Yes!”

The man turned around. The voices of the children thanking him seemed to echo through the alley. It was just a mission to give one coin, so why did his mind feel so heavy? Once he got back, the orc was watching him, while his two colleagues were silent. They were just looking at him strangely.

The orc tied him up again. The man didn't rebel as he was tied up and as the gag filled his mouth.

“.....”

They were quiet. The orc stood up again. Crockta dragged them towards another place.

CHAPTER 55

YIYU'S REVENGE (4)

“Do you have a dream?” The female elf asked.

The man panicked as he replied, “Dream?”

“Yes. A dream.”

He looked around. He couldn't see either the orc or his colleagues since they were hiding. He was being held hostage with two of his friends by a brutal orc. One of his friends was even ordered to give the children of the slums a gold coin, and he actually did it.

This time, the orc instructed him to sit in front of an elf and have his portrait drawn. There was an elf painting portraits of people in the square. Even though it was only 50 bronze, there was no one in front of the elf. It seemed like he was her only customer.

“I was actually trying to be a magician.” The elf said.

“Magician?”

“My grades weren't bad, so I entered an academy. I studied well.”

“Then why...?”

“Why are you painting here?” He swallowed down those words.

“But I wanted to paint. When I was a child, I saw Marcus' ‘Keltas Temple’ painting hanging in a museum.”

“Yes...”

“The shock I received at that time is still vivid. I looked at that painting and thought. One day, I want to draw something that gives other people an impression like that. Let's do what I want to do.”

The man nodded. A dream. He once had such a thing. It was impractical compared to the elf's dream. His dream had been to become a warrior of justice in order to defeat the villains. There was still a picture from childhood of himself wearing a cloak in a corner of his house.

"How about you, do you have a dream?" The elf asked again.

"Dream... it is strange..."

"What's wrong with it? Isn't it absurd that I want to become a great artist like Marcus?"

The elf's eyes flashed as she looked at him. There was a fresh smell coming from the elf. The beauty of the elf really disarmed him. He confessed to those beautiful blue eyes.

"A warrior who defeats the bad guys..." Then he looked away. The elf nodded seriously instead of laughing, like he had expected.

"I see. It's a nice dream."

".....!"

"There are many bad people in the world. I wish that you will become a nice guy who will help them."

The elf artist placed her pencil back on the canvas. "It is almost done."

The elf continued drawing. The man started thinking with a complicated head. Not everyone could have a dream, and not everyone could achieve their dream. He had forgotten about that dream for a long time.

"Now, it's finished!"

The elf handed over the picture. The picture wasn't an ordinary portrait. His face wasn't very big. However, he was wearing body armor, and was pointing a shining sword towards a dragon. In the picture, he didn't have the tired face that he sported now. He was pointing the sword with clear eyes.

"This..."

“You didn’t know? I don’t just draw the face.” The elf grinned. “What should I do? I don’t give refunds.”

“No. Thank you.” The man held the drawing in his arms. Somehow, it was hard for him to stay any longer. “Thank you.”

“Yes. Please live the life you’ve dreamed of. Fighting!”

The man felt an unknown emotion as he turned around. Just like the donation made by his colleague, he wasn’t sure what this was meant to do, so he just left. Just go away.

But something lingered in his heart. His steps slowed down and he stopped walking. Something, he would feel regret if he continued walking. He just wanted to say one thing. The impulse grew until the man turned around.

He walked back to the elf and said, “Painter.”

“Eh? Yes?”

The artist’s eyes widened. The man opened his mouth and said, “The thing you said earlier, about how it’s absurd that you will become a great painter like Marcus...”

The man faced the elf and stared straight into her eyes. “I don’t think that it is absurd. You will be sure to become one. You will become a great painter one day.”

The elf’s eyes shook. She flashed him a beautiful smile, like a flower blooming in the spring. It was a dazzling sunny face that he had never seen before.

“Thank you.”

The man turned around. He headed to the corner of the square where the orc and his two colleagues were hiding. He couldn’t say anything.

“You came back?”

“.....”

The orc asked, “The picture, will you show it to me?”

The man showed them the picture without speaking. The orc nodded. His two tied up

colleagues looked at the picture for a while before dropping their heads.

The man once again became the orc's captive, but he didn't feel like resisting. The three attackers were tied back together and dragged by the orc towards another place.



It was the third time. He had to do a mission after his two colleagues. This time, it was at a temple complex.

Those who followed the Goddess of Mercy set up buildings for the sickly and those in need. The people in charge were surprised to see the orc dragging in some men, but after a few words of conversation and donations, the group was let in.

The place that the orc headed to was the innermost, secret place of the temple. It was a hospice where the elderly stayed, the place where those who were about to die were taken.

"10 minutes," The orc asked. "Talk to them politely for 10 minutes."

"....."

"This is the last one."

"Understood. I will do it."

The man started moving. The orc and his two colleagues sat outside the room to listen to his conversation. The man wouldn't become passionate like his two friends. He firmly decided that he wouldn't be touched by the orc's missions.

Besides, everyone died when they were old. It was the natural flow of life. Moreover, he couldn't feel any sympathy towards the NPCs in a game. It was enough if he listened to the grieving lament of an old man.

However, he had to stop moving soon after he entered the room. A boy was lying in the room and looking at him. The boy set down the book he was reading on his chest and laughed at the stranger's visit.

"Hello."

“.....”

“Please sit down.”

The boy pointed to a chair nearby. The man hesitantly sat down beside him. He never thought that it would be a little kid.

“What brings you here? I heard you wanted to talk for a few minutes.”

“Well...”

“It’s okay. People like you often come, wanting to know the mindsets of those who will die soon.” The boy’s expression was bright, despite his previous words. “What are you? An adventurer?”

“I...”

In the world of Elder Lord, he was just a bad guy who hunted to make money and harassed other users.

The words in his mind didn’t emerge from his mouth. The boy stared at him. When a person stared at him like this, it was hard to distinguish between game and reality, especially when it was a sentimental situation like this.

Thus, he unknowingly told the truth, “I am a bar owner.”

In reality, he operated a bar.

“Ah, I thought you were an adventurer, based on your clothing.”

“What...?”

“It must be hard to own a bar. You know, people who are drunk can be violent... sometimes they even break...”

That’s right.

It was a hassle to deal with the drunk customers. Most of them just quietly drank their beverages, but he was always mentally tired because of the occasional incidents. Receiving smiles only once or twice a day was also annoying.

Therefore, he relieved his stress in Elder Lord. The anonymous wicked acts gave him a strange pleasure.

“I didn’t know I would be like this.”

“.....”

“I was on my way to school like usual, only to open my eyes in a medical ward. I was told that I have an incurable disease.”

It was obvious. This was a story he always saw on reality television. But why was his chest so heavy?

Yes, this was because of mirror nerves. There were mirror neurons that allowed him to sympathize with the boy after seeing him directly, allowing him to become more involved in the kid’s story. It was a physical reaction. Don’t pay attention to it.

The boy asked, “Do you know what I regret the most?”

“...What is it?”

“Can you guess?”

The man replied, “Well, things you’d like to do if you were healthy again? For example, eat something delicious or get a girlfriend. Things like this.”

The boy burst out laughing, shaking his head. “No. I don’t regret anything like that.”

“Then?”

“I regret the fact that I wasn’t more loving to my parents, my friends, and the people around me.”

“.....”

“I had a bitter fight with my friend the day before I collapsed. I complained to my parents that my breakfast wasn’t good. I didn’t say thank you to a great friend. I regret those things.”

The man moved his gaze. “I see.”

“Eating delicious foods or getting better grades, I don’t regret anything like that.” The boy grinned. “Mister should think about it as well. What do you really want to do if you don’t have much time left? What would you regret if you had no time left?”

The man had no answer for the boy. His last moments. It wouldn’t be nice.

The man got up from his seat without saying anything further. That orc bastard, he was doing a good job.

The man wasn’t such a pushover. The man turned around. He didn’t stop moving, despite feeling the boy’s gaze on his back.

‘Think about it. What would you regret?’

He suddenly stopped at the boy’s words. Regret. Some things couldn’t be reversed, and the most irreversible thing was death and parting.

The man had a thought. If he left this way, then he would regret it. Maybe he would regret this moment in the distant future. That thought was his answer. The man slowed down. Eventually, he stopped just before leaving the room.

Then he said to the boy, “Kid.”

“Yes.”

“Do you believe in Heaven?”

Looking back, the man saw that the boy was smiling. “No.”

“You are an old child.”

The man looked at the boy’s smiling face and eventually smiled back. “Hey.”

“Yes.”

“There is a Heaven up there.” This was the only comfort the man could give. “I’ll see you there.”

The boy laughed brightly. “Yes.”

A man left the room. When he closed the door, he saw the orc and two colleagues waiting in the dark corridor. His colleagues were released from their ties.

“Let’s go.” The orc said. They quietly followed behind the orc.



They were completely released from their binds, but they walked straight behind the orc.

The orc’s back was the most prominent sight. They thought that he was just an ignorant orc with strength. They knew they would be tortured. However, he only gave them three requests and released them after it was over.

The orc stopped. They were standing in front of the fountain in Maillard’s square. People were passing by with smiles and stiff faces. In the city where the lights didn’t go up at night, people were experiencing their own circumstances.

“There is a legend about this fountain.”

The orc said, “If you throw a coin into the fountain, your wish will come three.”

The orc laughed. “Everybody throw a coin.”

This time he didn’t give them coins. The moment they were each taking out a coin...

The orc said, “The legend was created in the temple. They will collect the coins thrown in the fountain and use it for those who have difficulties and those who need help, like the people you met tonight.”

“.....”

“I will be the first.”

The orc took out a shining gold coin. It was a large amount of money equivalent to 100 silver. The poor could live on that money for two months without worrying at all. The orc threw it.

“Now it is your turn.”

“.....”

The men took out coins and threw them towards the fountain. They made a wish together with the orc. He didn't ask them what their wishes were. The orc looked at the men with a profound gaze.

“It is up to here.” The orc spoke, “Whatever evil you have done thus far, I know that you aren't really bad guys.”

The three men couldn't open their mouths. The orc's eyes gazed at them in turn. “I'll see you again someday. Until then, stay alive.”

The orc turned around.

One of the men shouted towards the orc's receding back.

“Wait!”

The orc stopped.

“Let me know your name.”

The orc looked back towards them and declared, “Crockta.”

“.....!”

He left just like that.

The men stood frozen in place. The name Crockta, they had heard of it before.

It was a famous name in the Elder Lord community. He was an orc of justice who appeared out of nowhere, and did things that others couldn't do. Some people called him an event NPC, specifically created by the game publishers.

But that couldn't be. Such a great NPC wouldn't spend a strange night with them like this. Just like the NPCs with their own stories that the men met this evening, this orc was a resident of the world of Elder Lord, with his own life and ideals.

Their own unique and special lives.

“Crockta...”

The men chewed on his name before turning around. They didn’t talk to each other. Each one of them were thinking about the things they experienced today. Then suddenly, one of the men asked a NPC standing next to him, “Excuse me, can I ask you something?”

“Huh?”

“Is there a legend about throwing the coin in the fountain and making a wish?”

“.....?” The elf passing by laughed. “What are you talking about? There’s nothing like that. It’s just a fountain.”

“.....”

“Why would anyone throw money in there?”

The three men were stunned as the NPC left. Then they started laughing. It was a refreshing laugh, compared to the nasty smiles they sent Yiyu and Stella.

The three men moved away from the square’s fountain.

In the place they left, the fountain, four gold coins shone brightly, adding another bright light to Maillard’s wonder.

CHAPTER 56

TO THE NORTH (1)

There were legendary orc warriors who came to Lenox's funeral.

The news that one of them, Anya, cut off the head of a human Earl spread across the continent. Anya the mad slaughterer. She infiltrated the castle with her brutal warriors while he was sleeping and cruelly ripped the Earl apart.

After cutting his head off, she left a message in his blood.

[Revenge.]

Only this one word. Once it was reported, it was regarded as an emergency in the loose coalition of cities in the human kingdom.

At the same time, it was rumored that the Thawing Balhae Clan were disbanded by an orc who got revenge for Lenox's death.

The incident involving the Thawing Balhae Clan in Arnin wasn't known throughout the world. However, they observed that the orc Crockta played a crucial role in Chesswood, and that Crockta continued to hunt the rest of the Thawing Balhae clan members into extinction. As the Thawing Baelhae Clan disappeared without a sound, the details remained a mystery.

A clan of users was broken by a single NPC. The fact that Elder Lord was a virtual reality game with a high level of realism was once again engraved onto the user's mind. There were some users who protested to Elder Saga Corporation, but this was also ignored as part of the game.

The moment the reputation of the orcs shook the continent, they disappeared somewhere again.

"I didn't know that orcs were so tough."

"....."

“We have to back off,” One man said, his group sitting around a table. “Ending up like this because of an NPC...”

He was the Thawing Balhae clan master, and also the one who killed Lenox in conjunction with the Earl NPC.

Sitting beside him were the executives who survived the disbanding of the Thawing Balhae Clan. Most of them had been trounced by the orc Crockta and were forced to either quit or start a new game.

“Hyunchul, I’m sorry.”

“No, it is nothing.”

“I didn’t get to raise you properly.”

Hyunchul was the user who allowed the raid to succeed after gaining the orcs’ trust as Grom. As they were friends in reality, the clan master often called him by name.

“No, you are Luin here.”

“Yes.”

He reset his character, and his name was now Luin.

The clan master said, “Now we have to prepare for the big one so just wait. Do you guys remember everything?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, Brother.”

“Everybody knows,” They all answered. The clan master received overwhelming support from them.

“Do you know the Heaven and Earth Clan?”

“Heaven and Earth... that...”

“Isn’t that the place of Rommel, Choi Hansung?”

The Heaven and Earth Clan and 'Rommel'. He was one of the most famous users in Elder Lord.

Rommel had found a rare job, known as a hidden piece, and was promoted to the War Maestro class. He was a user who showed tremendous skill in group battles through his excellent commanding abilities.

He was recognized for his leadership abilities and his connection to nobles, sweeping up a huge amount of achievement points and gold.

"Whose strategy was it to use the NPCs? Wasn't this started by Keynes?"

"That's right, Brother."

"Choi Hansung is connected to the nobles."

"Ohh..."

"I have a good relationship with him. Sooner or later, we will start again. At that time, we will be with Choi Hansung."

Everyone nodded. Heaven and Earth was a huge clan. Rommel received numerous users after demonstrating his commanding abilities, and there were numerous wars with other clans. Rommel also assisted NPC nobles in conflicts with other nobles, and his group was now a first rate mercenary group in Elder Lord.

"Sooner or later, that orc bastard..."

As he listened to Clan Master Keynes' words, the man who had become Luin recalled an orc. He couldn't see properly on the battlefield, but he had seen the orc's appearance through a video uploaded by Laney. This orc was dreadful, scary, and covered in tattoos.

There was a vaguely familiar feel to him. He shook his head at the thought.

They were both wearing a black bandana and using a greatsword, but they had nothing else in common. He was big, there were tattoos covering his face and body, and his name was Crockta. More than anything else, he was too powerful. It was unimaginable that he was the orc who started with Hyunchul.

It couldn't be. Luin couldn't forget the look in Ian's eyes. It was just a game. Luin smiled. Now he had reset and was raising a new character. He felt sorry for Ian, but this was the real world.

Keynes said, "Hyunchul, let's go hunting. I'll boost you up."

"Yes Brother!"

"The rest of you should act moderately. We will reassemble soon."

The other executives bowed their heads.

"Yes!"

Everybody's answer rang out inside the room. Clan Master Keynes stood up and made a gesture to Luin.

"Believe in me."

"Yes, Brother."

"Fighting!"

"Yes, Bul..."

Luin hesitated. He had almost shouted the orc's cry, 'Bul'tar'. He smiled bitterly and shouted, "Yes, Brother. Fighting!"

Within the darkness of Elder Lord, the remnants of Thawing Balhae dreamed of once again bouncing back to their former status.



Crockta searched the pub signs and checked the paper in his hand again.

[If there is an inverted triangle on the signboard of a city pub, it means the Information Guild exists in the city.]

Maillard was a big city, but he couldn't find a single reverse triangle engraved on a sign anywhere. Crockta frowned. He would have to go to another city.

As he was distressed, he arrived at the Blacksmith branch in Maillard. He owed Stella for yesterday.

"I am alive," Crockta said as he entered.

"Huh?"

At the end of the counter, a male customer was leaning towards Stella and protesting, "Hey! I definitely asked for a special scar healing potion, but what is this?"

He pointed to his face. His face couldn't be seen from Crockta's position. Stella linked her hands together and said, "Customer."

"What? Do you have something to say?"

Crockta observed her response.

"You believed in us and purchased a premium scar healing potion, so I can understand why you are upset."

"You understand!"

"I would be really angry if I were you. You believed in the Blacksmith Company, and paid a large amount of money, only for the effectiveness to not match your expectations... it is both disappointing and a cheat. If I were you, I might've destroyed this place."

"Hmph!"

"I'm really sorry." Stella bowed her head. "To be honest, the Exclusive Scar Healing Potion doesn't have the power to eliminate all old scars. That power is exclusive to the realm of the gods. I'm not hiding anything from you."

"What did you say? Give me a refund!"

"You are disappointed... I can understand; however, I can't give you a refund since the potion is already used. I have to follow the guidelines from higher up... I really apologize. However, if you give us a chance, how about a 50% discount to the scar healing clinic that we are partnered with?"

“C-Clinic... what?”

“Unlike potions, you can check your scars and manage them carefully. I can’t promise a cure, but they will gradually get better. How about it?”

“How much?”

“The price...”

Crockta nodded. There were a number of fixed tactics in the world. The rules were the norm because they had proved effective over long periods of times. These tactics were then improved through practice and theory.

Stella’s response was a merchant’s tactic. She wasn’t fooled by any anomalies in the past and followed her own inclinations.

“Brilliant.”

Crockta nodded as he watched the client pay Stella for the temple clinic. After the calculations were over, the customer left and discovered Crockta at the door.

“.....!”

The customer stiffed the moment he saw the forbidding face of the orc. Crockta declared, “Look.”

“.....?”

“Are you really going to get rid of that scar?”

There was a sword scar that peeked out from under his eyes, all the way towards his sideburns. The man looked at Crockta. “What are you talking about?”

“Based on the calluses on your hands, you are a swordsman. Right?”

“Yes.”

“A scar on the back is shameful!” Crockta paraphrased a line from a cartoon that was popular a long time ago. “But a scar in the front is a sign of honor.”

“.....!”

“Moreover, the scar is under your eyes. You would’ve glared sharply and pierced the enemy’s throat, even as the enemy’s blade is slipping underneath your eyes. Your scars are a proof of this event.”

The man stared blankly at the orc. The orc laughed, “Thanks to that scar, you look like a better man.”

“.....!”

The man looked like he had gained enlightenment.

He reached out a hand and touched his scar. It was an old sword wound. Every time he saw it, the memory of that dangerous battle appeared in his mind, the dangerous moment where he could’ve died. He had been ashamed because he had been hurt by the enemy.

But that wasn’t it. A warrior’s wound would never be disgraceful.

The man nodded. He went back and quietly refunded the ticket to the scar healing temple clinic.

Stella stared intensely. Crockta also looked at him. The man came back to Crockta and said, “Thank you. I’ve learned a lot because of you.”

“There is a saying about the universal brotherhood. We are brothers who walk along the same sword edge.”

“That’s right Brother.”

The man and Crockta shook hands firmly.

“My name is Palawan. You are?”

“Crockta.”

“I’ve heard of it. They say you are a true warrior.”

Palawan nodded with a smile. “In the future, if we meet again on the battlefield... I will

spare you once.”

“.....!”

A remark filled with pride! Crockta also replied with a warrior’s smile, “Kulkulkul. Okay. I’ll spare you twice.”

“Then I will do it three times.”

“Four times!”

“Five...”

“.....”

The two laughed and let go of their hands.

“I just hope that I don’t meet you as an enemy.”

“I hope the same.”

“It was great to meet you, Crockta. I’ll see you again someday.”

“Bul’tar. See you alive again.”

The man left. Stella had already headed to the entrance to glare at Crockta. She spoke the moment that the man left the store, “You’re ruining my business!”

“...Hrmm. I’m sorry.”

“This is what I get in return for my work? Bah.”

“Well, I can buy potions?”

“It’s okay.” Stella folded her arms. “What happened?”

“I came here to thank you for your help yesterday.”

“That reminds me, did the rehabilitation go well?”

“I’m not sure. I just did what I could.” Crockta smiled. Stella saw the wicked smile and didn’t ask for any more details. Maybe they were stuck somewhere in the sewers of Maillard.

“Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Then...”

Stella’s head whirled as she started thinking. “Start a performance account with me.”

“Account?”

“The Blacksmith Company has recently entered the banking business using a deposit and withdrawal system. There are many branches nationwide to support this. In addition, it also supports an exchange of letters.”

It was for her benefit. This was a way to stay connected to an NPC that she might not meet again in the world of Elder Lord! He would manage his money with the Blacksmith Company, and at the same time, she could contact him through correspondence.

Ian the novice orc, who was on her friends list, had already disappeared from her memory. This orc was Stella’s new connection.

“Hrmm. I understand. I didn’t know there was such a thing.”

“It is a newly introduced service. Here is the paperwork.”

He filled out the papers she gave him. Crockta deposited some of the money he had on hand. 20 gold. It was a big amount of money. It was some of the profit he earned from hunting the Thawing Balhae Clan.

“This is your number. Letters can be shared via magic crystal, so you can check at any time if someone leaves it in your correspondence box. Check it often.”

“I understand. It is amazing.”

“This is magic.” Stella quickly grabbed Crockta’s papers. “You know that you still have some debt left?”

“It wasn’t resolved with this account?”

“That is the debt for my help yesterday. There is still the debt for the customer today.”

“Kulkul, I see.”

Crockta nodded and told Stella, “I was wondering about one thing.”

“Yes.”

“Do you know any pub with an inverted triangle on the sign?”

“Triangle? I’m not sure.”

At that moment, a new employee appeared since it was time to change shifts. He started at the sight of the orc, but soon calmed down after realizing Crockta was friends with Stella. The employee spoke politely since Stella had been promoted to manager of a store, which was a long way from an intern.

Stella whispered, “That guy’s an intern.”

“.....”

It was an unchanging law. If someone escaped from suffering, a new person would share that pain. Life was a harsh zero sum game.

“Okay. Let’s walk around and try to find it. What do you think?”

He went around the pubs with Stella. However, there was no pub with an inverted triangle. Crockta looked at the note given to him by Derek again.

[If there is an inverted triangle on the signboard of a city pub, it means the Information Guild exists in the city.

Go into the pub and order cream spaghetti. Ask for chopsticks instead of a fork to eat it with.

After that...]

“Triangle...”

Stella suddenly pointed to a pub on the corner of the road.

“Isn’t it over there?”

There was no inverted triangle. The Pub’s sign displayed the name, ‘Where are my Brothers?’, with an old piece of cloth hanging from the sign, shaking in the wind. It was a typical bar in the darkness of the city! It was a place that wouldn’t suit an honorable orc like Crockta.

“Where is the triangle...?”

“There.”

“Umm?”

Looking closely, the cloth wasn’t just a cloth. It was a red panty.

“.....!”

Red and lacy see-through underwear. In other words, an inverted triangle. If this was really the marking of the Information Guild, then their reliability had just decreased.

“Surely that...” Well, he would know if he ordered cream spaghetti. “Thank you. I found it thanks to you.”

“.....”

Stella started to edge away from Crockta.

“You asked for my help... to come to this place?” It was natural to think like this. The name of the pub and the underwear. Stella stepped back. “Uh, I’ve helped you, so I am going.”

“Ah, no! I think there is a misunderstanding...”

“Have a great time!”

“.....”

Stella turned and ran away.

“...Bul’tar.”

Somehow, it was embarrassing. He wasn’t that type of man. Crockta comforted his wounded heart and turned his body. Anyway, he had found the Information Guild. It was enough if he could obtain the information he desired.

Did they know about the remnants of the Thawing Balhae Clan?

Crockta opened the door of the pub called ‘Where are my Brothers?’

CHAPTER 57

TO THE NORTH (2)

The door opened.

The faces inside the gloomy pub turned towards Crockta. They discovered the appearance of an orc before turning back to their conversations. It was an old pub that had scenery similar to Van Gogh's 'The Potato Eaters.'

Crockta sat at a table. The owner of the place, who was standing at the bar, threw a glance to Crockta, as if he was asking what he wanted. Crockta declared, "Cream spaghetti."

He spoke quietly, but the inside of the pub was narrow, causing his low voice to echo inside. The pub customers turned to Crockta after hearing cream spaghetti. His eyes turned dreary. The guests were laughing at him.

"An orc ordering cream spaghetti... This isn't a comedy."

"Isn't that a dish for girls? Kukukuk..."

"Will he also order strawberry juice and a kiwi parfait? Kelkel..."

Crockta's eyebrows twitched.

The pub owner also laughed, like he thought it was absurd, before going into the kitchen. He placed butter in the frying pan, poured in chicken broth, and stirred it quickly, so that there were no solid clumps. At the same time, he prepared 160 grams of spaghetti and boiled it in three times the amount of water, while also cooking bacon in another pan.

It was a classic recipe.

Crockta admired the master's meticulousness while also squinting at the table of the customers who were laughing at him.

They were eating pork dishes and drinking strong alcohol. They placed thick pieces in

their mouths and sucked on their greasy fingers. Their eyes were filled with arrogance as they looked at Crockta while chewing on the meat. Then they gulped down the alcohol.

“.....”

He had to admit it. They were rugged men, real males. He was eating cream spaghetti in the holy place of these men. Crockta found himself becoming smaller on the inside. The one who was blind to romance and dating had ordered a cream spaghetti!

The food he ordered came out, and Crockta discovered the fork and spoon wrapped in a napkin. He stopped the owner and said, “Wait.”

“.....?”

The owner looked at him with a scornful look, as if his customer was being troublesome. Crockta said, “Chopsticks.”

“...Hoh.” His eyes changed.

“Chopsticks.”

The atmosphere in the pub was released at Crockta’s declaration, becoming one where the other people recognized him as a man.

“I thought he would put the fork and spoon in the bowl to twirl the spaghetti.”

“Maybe it just suits his taste?”

“I also want to eat greasy food sometimes. Kukuk.”

They nodded as they placed boiled eggs in their mouths and chewed. Crockta also slurped up the spaghetti using the chopsticks. He chewed and ordered whiskey. He downed the glass of whiskey handed to him by the owner.

“Kuoh.”

Crockta was now a brother of the pub after drinking the alcohol.

“Ah, right.”

He had been swept up in the atmosphere. He had a separate mission. Crockta looked at the note again.

[Go into the pub and order cream spaghetti. Then, ask for chopsticks instead of a fork to eat it with.

After that, take a line of spaghetti and use it to draw an inverted triangle on the table.

Then they will give you access.]

“.....!”

It was a big deal. Crockta had already eaten all his cream spaghetti. He forcefully raised the hand that wouldn't go up. The owner looked over at Crockta and approached, placing a hand on Crockta's shoulder.

“Hey, Macho Orc. Do you want something to drink now?”

Crockta spoke in a hesitant tone, “Cr...”

“Cr?”

“Cream spaghetti... one more...”

The owner's gaze became cold.

“.....”

Crockta looked down. The owner returned to the kitchen without speaking. When he looked around, the other customers were also shaking their heads at Crockta.

Crockta was ashamed. He vowed that as soon as he obtained information from the guild, he would eat a whole pig here. In the end, Crockta ate the cream spaghetti again with the chopsticks and drew an inverted triangle on the table.

“.....”

The owner's eyes changed when he saw the symbol. The owner walked towards Crockta and banged on the table.

“Hey, Orc.”

“.....”

Crockta turned to him. The owner beckoned, “Come here.”

Then he opened a door in a corner of the pub and entered. Crockta looked after him with a grim expression and followed as the pub customers heckled after the orc.

“What did you do Orc? Are you going to be hit?”

“Don’t cry as you’re being beaten. Kelkel.”

“If you endure it, then I’ll buy you some cream spaghetti, and some sawberry juice as well. Kikik!”

They dug back into their pork with the reassurance that they were eating manly foods.

The interior of the room was larger than Crockta thought. The pub owner pulled something on the floor and revealed a staircase leading to the basement. It looked quite deep. He glanced at Crockta and descended.

Deep underground, there was a dark, dimly lit room that looked like it was meant for investigation purposes. Inside was a table with two chairs facing each other. They each sat down and Crockta asked, “The panty is the mark of the guild?”

“It is our belief.”

“Panties?”

“It is the intelligence guild’s belief that they can even discover the color of a person’s panties.”

“.....”

“There are some branches that are ashamed and use the inverted triangle, but I respect tradition.”

It was odd but it made sense. Crockta nodded. “In any case, I came to buy information.”

“What information do you want, Crockta?”

“.....!”

Crockta raised his gaze. This man already knew Crockta’s name. The man laughed and continued, “Do you want to chase after the rest of the Thawing Balhae Clan?”

“.....!” Crockta quickly agreed. “Yes, truly great. I can believe that you are an information guild.”

“The information about the Thawing Balhae Clan costs either 20 gold or 30 gold.”

“What’s the difference?”

“I will let you know if you have the money.”

Crockta nodded with folded arms. “It’s quite expensive.”

“The payment needs to be upfront.”

“...Here.”

Crockta pulled out some money. He hadn’t known that he was going to pay 30 gold, so there wasn’t much money left. “Now, let me know the difference.”

“20 gold is for the current information, while 30 gold will give you more information in the future.”

“You mean?”

“The exact location of those guys is still unknown, but we will keep an eye on them and continue to accumulate information. I will provide you with any information I gain in the future.”

Crockta shook his head. “How can I trust you? What if you fail?”

“Failure...”

The man from the information guild got up from his seat before turning to the wall behind him. He placed his hand inside the hole on the wall. The sound of someone

moving around could be heard from within. When he finally pulled out his hand, he was holding a piece of paper in it.

The information guild must be beyond this room. The man handed the piece of paper to Crockta.

“Luin.”

“Luin?”

“That is the new name of Grom, the one who you are tracking.”

Crockta’s face stiffened. He checked the paper that the man gave him. On it was the name ‘Luin’, a rough description of his appearance, and some other information on it.

“Do you know that those cursed by the stars can change their appearance?”

“.....”

“It’s hard to believe, but it’s true. They lose all of their abilities and appear with a new look. The orc Grom, the one who betrayed you and Lenox, has now become a human. We can hardly believe it either. The curse of the stars is a really unknown phenomenon.”

Crockta listened to his words. The man seemed to have a subtle understanding of the users. NPCs were gradually grasping onto the characteristics of users. Crockta once again felt like Elder Lord was mysterious.

Were they really just AIs in a game? Were the three-dimensional characters he met just fakes designed for the game to be enjoyed?

‘Go to the Temple of the Fallen God.’

Gordon’s voice was heard again. Crockta had a strong feeling that he should go to the Temple of the Fallen God.

Crockta said, “Yes, I will believe you. Then I will buy one more piece of information.”

“What is it?”

“Do you know about the Temple of the Fallen God?”

He looked at Crockta, not expecting this question.

“Temple of the Fallen God... I don’t have any information about it. The north is far beyond our influence.” The north, a harsh land where ogres roamed freely and wyverns flew across the skies. “I know the approximate location since it isn’t hard to find. I can get it from anywhere. I’ll give it to you for free.”

“Thank you.”

“Do you mean to go to the north?”

Crockta nodded. The man looked at Crockta. Tattoos everywhere and a burly body. An excellent greatsword. It was the appearance of a powerful man worthy of the rumors. He was qualified to head north.

“When you came back from the north, I will have information about the Thawing Balhae Clan ready.” The man grinned.

“I understand. The current information has been sent to the mailbox of the Blacksmith Company.”

The information guild already knew that Crockta had an account. Crockta had only made it today because of Stella, yet they already knew. It meant an information source existed inside the Blacksmith Company. Maybe it was Stella’s intern.

Crockta nodded and got up. The man spoke, “If you are going to the north then you might want to find out more information from Quantes.”

Quantes was a city located on the fringes of the north. Crockta entered the name Quantes in his head.

Crockta climbed the stairs with the owner and entered the pub, where the previous pub customers were still present. They looked between Crockta and the pub owner with excitement in their eyes.

“What, no blows were exchanged?”

“He looks fine.”

The customers said with disappointment.

Crockta spoke to the information guild employee and owner of the pub, "Hey."

".....?"

He glanced at Crockta for a moment. It was a signal to not say anything about the information guild. But Crockta wasn't trying to talk about that.

"A roasted pig, is it possible to get that here?"

".....!"

The pub customers were stunned by Crockta's words.

"I would like to eat a whole roasted pig."

The pub owner looked at Crockta with surprise before laughing. "Can you afford it?"

"Of course."

Crockta looked at the customers who laughed at him and said, "It's different from eating a sandwich that only contains a few pieces of pork."

".....!"

Their faces distorted but they couldn't make any excuses.

The pub owner went into the kitchen to prepare a roasted pig. In a corner of the kitchen, there was a complete pig barbecue system with ventilation. He placed a pig on a skewer and started cooking it. The great smell of pork filled the inside of the pub.

"Hum hum. We will be going."

"Yes."

"Eat deliciously, orc brother."

The customers drank the remaining alcohol and tried to escape the pub like they were running away. Crockta called after them.

“Hey, you guys.”

“Yes...?”

They looked back at Crockta. Crockta gestured to the kitchen and asked. “Aren’t you going to eat?”

“.....!”

They came to a stop. That’s right. The orc was a man.

They laughed and teased him about strawberry juice, but a real man wouldn’t care. He forgot all about earlier and invited them without any hesitation. It wouldn’t be manly if they refused the invitation.

“This is... we have lost.”

“Orc, you are a real man.”

“I met a decent male. Kikikik.”

They turned around again. Together with Crockta, they ate pork and drank wine. The pub owner joined them at a later time.

The communion between men!

It was the last dinner that Crockta enjoyed before heading to the north to find the Temple of the Fallen God.

CHAPTER 58

QUANTES (1)

Crockta stood before a gate.

This was Quantes, the city of the gnomes. Perhaps that was why both the city and entrance seemed small. The gate was firmly closed. Crockta knocked on the gate and waited for the gatekeeper to show up.

However, no one showed up. The door remained firmly closed. Crockta folded his arms. It seemed like there was a ban on foreigners today. The moment that Crockta was thinking about yelling...

The ground started to shake.

“.....?”

Something huge was running this way. Crockta turned around, his eyes widening in shock. From far away, huge monsters were leaping off the ground.

Ogres!

They were several times larger and much more burly than orcs. Their intelligence was low, but they acted on their instincts, and were one of the worst monsters that attacked others randomly, chewing them alive.

The ogres looked at Crockta and drooled, saw-like teeth flashing in their mouths. The flesh and blood of various unknown animals were stuck to them.

Crockta tried to flee, but they had already found him and rushed towards him.

“Kuweeeh!”

The ogre wielded a huge wooden stick that Crockta quickly dodged. The wind whistled in Crockta’s ears as the stick forcefully sliced through the air.

A chill went down his spine. This was the ogre’s power. He heard the stories, but this

was the first time he heard it directly.

“Damn, Bul’tar...!”

However, he was an orc, a fierce warrior. In addition, his weapon was Ogre Slayer, a greatsword crafted by the Golden Anvil Clan! Maybe he had finally met the right enemies. Crockta carefully moved his greatsword.

However, there wasn’t just one ogre, but many more. Five other ogres soon began to approach Crockta. It was an emergency if even one ogre appeared at a city. Crockta fell back against the city wall.

“This...!”

He had forgotten about his rear. As Crockta’s eyes widened, the ogres seemed to be smiling at him. Crockta scrambled to raise his greatsword and prepared for the worst. He vowed to kill at least one.

Bam bam bbam bba bam bam bamm-!

Suddenly, trumpets sounded from above Crockta’s head and a loud voice could be heard from behind him.

“Quantes’ Gnome Garrison! Asura Thousand Wave Artillery, load!”

“Asura Thousand Wave Artillery, complete!”

Crockta looked up at the sound. At the edge of the wall, cannons were sticking out. The childish voices continued to shout, “Turn off the safety device!”

“Off!”

“Aim towards the target!”

“Aimed!”

“These guys! Let them know the cost of attacking our city! Launchhhh!”

“Launchhhh!”

Lights flashed above Crockta's head and there was the sound of something exploding as the lights flew towards the ogres. Red, blue, and other variously colored lights hit the ogres' bodies.

"Woooo...!"

"Kueeong...!"

The ogres struck by the energy guns stayed still for a moment before falling over. The gnomes didn't stop their attacks as a baptism of magic power followed. The ogres crouched and covered their heads.

The gnomes' attacks struck the ogres without rest. It wasn't a physical attack, but a magical bombardment of magic bullets made by using the extensive magic engineering skills of the gnomes. Then, the attacks stopped.

He could hear a fuss occurring on the walls.

"Uwaih, charge faster, charge faster!"

"There isn't enough magic power *dot*!"

"They're getting up!"

"Why are the supplies coming so late?"

"Stay calm!"

The ogres crouching on the ground noticed the pause in bombardment and got up and started to roar.

"Kuweeeh!"

"Kuwaaaaaaaah!"

The ground rumbled as the ogres rushed towards the wall with angry expressions. Crockta hurriedly moved out of the way.

Kwaang!

They swung their weapons at the gate, cracking it. One ogre even started climbing up the wall.

“What should we do, Captain Tiyo?”

“C-C-Calmly!”

The angry ogres moved away from Crockta and rushed towards the walls and the gate, aiming for the gnomes. Crockta, who had been quietly watching from a distance, approached them from behind with Ogre Slayer in his hand. The ogre’s thick skin couldn’t be deeply wounded by an ordinary sword. At best, it would just raise the ogre’s anger.

However, Crockta’s sword, Ogre Slayer, was different. It was a named sword. Crockta leaped towards the ogre climbing the wall and wielded his sword. The blade tore at the ogre’s skin.

“Eeeeeng!”

The ogre fell from the wall.

“.....!”

The gnomes hunting the ogres discovered Crockta’s presence.

“What?”

The gnomes saw an orc swinging a greatsword at the ogres outside the wall.

“An orc?”

Orcs weren’t often seen in Quantas. Furthermore, it was the first time they had ever seen an orc fight against an ogre alone. The ogre backed away every time the orc’s sword flashed. Dazzling swordsmanship!

Captain Tiyo shouted at the garrison soldiers who were staring blankly, “Everybody move quickly! It’s impossible for an orc alone!”

“Yep!”

“This will give us enough time *dot!*”

The gnomes on the wall hurriedly charged their magic power. Captain Tiyo looked down with sober eyes. Out of the five ogres, the orc was completely marking one. The rest of them were attacking the gate, or climbing up the other walls.

“Um...!”

It was dangerous. In particular, the gate was on the verge of crumbling. At that moment...

“Bul’tarr—!”

The orc escaped from the ogre he was attacking and ran towards the one striking the gate. He swung the greatsword at one of the ogre’s legs.

“Keooooook!”

The ogre staggered and turned a pair of furious eyes towards the orc.

The orc shouted, “Come! Don’t run or hide!”

“Uwooooooh!”

“Kuoooooh!”

Two ogres rushed towards the orc. The orc started running away after receiving their attention. His movements were swift but there was a limit. The ogre’s stick hit the orc’s greatsword.

“Ugh!”

The orc blocked it with his greatsword, but his body flew through the air from the impact. He soon landed and rolled on the ground. The ogre’s stick aimed towards the orc again, who rolled to avoid it.

Tiyo started sweating as he watched the battle. The orc continued to attack the ogres with dangerous movements. Without the orc, the ogres would’ve climbed up the walls and killed the gnomes by now.

A great warrior.

Captain Tiyo shouted, "Ready!"

"Yep! It is ready!"

"The preparations are complete!"

The Quantes gnomes soldiers replied. Tiyo also inserted magic power into the rifle on his shoulders. His weapon, the magic rifle 'General', was an ancient legacy that was classified as an artifact. Tiyo aimed for an ogre's head.

"Save the orc! Power aim!"

"Aim!"

"Launchhhh!"

Before long, the colorful magic power of the gnomes sparked again. The red and blue magic bullets hit the ogres, who lost their balance and fell to the ground.

"Uwooooooh!"

Crockta looked up. A small gnome holding a rifle was staring at him from the wall. He pointed at the ogre and lifted his thumb and then turned it upside down. It was an obvious signal.

Crockta nodded and firmly grasped his greatsword, Ogre Slayer. The ogres were still curled up as magic bullets continued to fall onto their bodies. It was time to end them once and for all.

There was no need to give them a good send-off to the afterlife. At a glance, life and death seemed to be quite distant. It was the fate of a swordsman to connect the two ends that seemed to be far away from each other!

The Ogre Slayer broke the neck of the defenseless ogres. Two ogres died in quick succession. The rest of the group was still attached to the walls. Their expressions changed as they saw that the situation was suddenly changing. The ogres' disgusting faces seemed more demon like.

They revealed their saw blade like teeth and roared, “Kuweeeh!”

“Kuaaaah!”

They launched themselves off the wall and rushed towards Crockta.

They were fools.

“...Bul’tar!”

Crockta raised his greatsword.

Running away from the walls just made them better targets for the gnomes’ magic power. The magic power of the gnomes poured towards the backs of the ogres, who were hit by the magic power. They rolled to the ground upon impact.

The destructive power wasn’t enough to kill them, but the gnomes’ Asura Thousand Wave Artillery caused each ogre tremendous suffering. Then Crockta’s greatsword, the Ogre Slayer, killed them!

Even the fearful ogres of Elder Lord couldn’t beat this combination. Crockta sliced them one by one. The ogres suffered from bloodshot eyes and breathed their last breath.

Crockta turned his head. The gnomes holding rifles and dressed in soldier uniforms were staring at Crockta.

Bam bam bbam bba bam bam bamm-!

The sound of the trumpet rang out again, like a signal marking the start of the battle. At that moment, a gnome with a long rifle saluted towards Crockta. It was the best honor for friends who fought together.

Following him, the other Quantas soldiers also saluted Crockta. Crockta felt an unknown feeling inside as he was saluted by the small gnomes on the wall.

He was a soldier who often crossed the line, but he didn’t receive salutations often. People were too afraid of him to pay tribute to him. He wasn’t a soldier guarding the border, but one who broke through the border in order to kill people.

This was a strange feeling. Crockta faced them and saluted.

Bam bam bbam bba bam bam bamm-!

The trumpet of victory sounded again. The eye contact between warriors!

It was the first meeting of Captain Tiyo of the Quantes Gnomes Garrison and the orc warrior Crockta.



“What did you come here for?” Captain Tiyo asked in a loud voice.

He had a childlike quality to his voice, but the force behind it was like a general’s voice during a wartime rally. They were sitting in front of the entrance management office, located across from Quanta’ gate.

Crockta replied, “I came to get help before heading north.”

Captain Tiyo frowned. The north was the dangerous area where the group of ogres that almost defeated them today came from, and the place where many other scary things dwelled.

“Well, it doesn’t really matter. You have your circumstances. But Quantes isn’t accepting outsiders for a while *dot!*”

“Why not?”

Crockta knew that Quantes was a city of gnomes, but it wasn’t a place with limited access like Arnin.

“These days, many creatures are pouring from the north *dot*. Not just the ogres, but doppelgangers and the evil lich *dot*. They have blocked access to outsiders due to the doppelganger *dot*.”

“Umm...”

“The doppelganger is still somewhere here *dot!*”

Crockta understood the situation. However, this made it difficult for him. Tiyo said,

“But I can believe in you *dot*. You are a fellow who defeated the ogres along with us! I will guarantee your identity and send you in.”

“Yes!”

Crockta nodded. He reached out.

“Thank you.”

“Bah! Don’t say it like that *dot*!”

Tiyo waved his hands as if he was embarrassed. The gnome’s words and behavior were completely different from each other.

Gnomes were the size of a child. If the dwarves gave off a small and reliable impression, the gnomes were cute like small humans. However, they excelled in magician engineering, and were the best in the field of magic, enchanting, and engineering.

Despite being a great alternative to the elves, they were the next least popular species after the orcs.

“Good *dot*. What is your name? Where are you from?” Tiyo asked since he was acting as the entrance attendant.

“My name is Crockta. I became a warrior at Orcrox Fortress, and am currently heading to the north.”

Tiyo’s eyes widened. “Crockta? Honorable Orc Crockta?”

Crockta’s shoulders went up. “Hum hum, some people call me that. Kulkulkul.”

“Ohh! Glorious!”

Tiyo stood up excitedly before sitting down again. His response made it seem like he was trying not to lose his dignity.

“Hu, hum hum! In any case! You use a big sword, and have tattoos all over your body, so you fit the description of Crockta. The bravery you showed today also fits with Crockta *dot*. Welcome to Quantas *dot*.”

Thus, Crockta was allowed access to Quantes.

“But you should be careful. Right now, the public sentiment in Quantes isn’t good *dot*. Recently, a doppelganger has committed a series of murders. In particular, you are a scary orc so...”

“It’s okay.”

“Did you say you came to Quantes before going to the north?”

Crockta nodded.

“The North... There are students studying the north, so it would be good if you visited the academy *dot*,” Tiyo said. His tone was grim and sober, but he had a child’s voice, so Crockta couldn’t help smiling. Tiyo noticed and frowned.

“An oversized orc shouldn’t ignore gnomes *dot*. Gnomes are very clever, wise, and powerful *dot*.”

“I know. Your magic power is really great.”

“Hmm hmm! It is natural. We are proud of our gnomes *dot*. Kikik.” Tiyo was in a good mood and laughed loudly. “Crockta, I will authorize your access.

“Thank you Tiyo.”

He left the administration office with Tiyo. The city of the gnomes was small and charming, but everything was organized. Unlike other cities, the streets were blocked and arranged regularly in a modern configuration.

“Hum hum. Crockta?”

“.....?”

“When I saw your salute before, your posture was quite excellent *dot*. Do you have any military experience?”

Crockta laughed. “I once served.”

“Hoh, I see. You were a soldier.” Tiyo’s eyes lit up. “I have agreed to drink with the squad

members who defeated the ogres. Crockta contributed as well, so you should go with me!"

Alcohol. No man could refuse.

Thus, Crockta wandered the streets with the gnome captain Tiyo.

CHAPTER 59

QUANTES (2)

Crockta drank with Tiyo and the rest of the garrison before returning to his accommodation. It was a clean inn. The city of gnomes was a good place to stay because it was clean throughout.

The innkeeper was wary towards Crockta, but eventually accepted his money and reluctantly gave him a room.

“Your room is Number 304. Here is the key.”

“Thank you.”

Crockta went up to his room and opened the door. The first thing that stood out to him was the white sheet.

“Hoh.”

Everything was arranged without error like in a hotel instead of an inn. Everything was clean. It was enough to make him forget the innkeeper’s unkind attitude.

Crockta sat down on the bed. He could see the bathtub from there through the half-open door of the bathroom. This meant the drainage facilities were good. Crockta marveled at the level of civilization that the gnomes had achieved. It seemed like they weren’t just experts in magic engineering.

The accommodation was a little expensive, but it was reasonable if the facilities were this clean.

Crockta laid down on the bed and thought of what to do next.

First, look for information about the North. He also needed to prepare for the trip. If possible, find some colleagues. The north was a harsh land so it was better to go with other people instead of alone.

“Temple of the Fallen God...”

He wondered if he could find answers there.

Crockta reached out for the ceiling.

The rough hands of an orc were visible. He slowly formed a fist. As he used his strength, his blood vessels could be seen through the green skin. The muscles protruded and the blood pumped stirred along with his heartbeat. His whole body felt full of vitality.

Was this truly a fantasy world? Crockta was overwhelmed by an unknown feeling after he met the man called Gordon. It seemed like he could find the answer if he went to the Temple of the Fallen God.

“Hoo.”

Crockta got up from the bed. It was nighttime, but Users didn’t need to sleep. He headed to the bathroom to wash up. However, there were no towels in the bathroom. Crockta went down to the counter on the ground floor to receive a towel and returned to his room.

An elf was using a key on the door next to Crockta. Their eyes met. The elf stared at Crockta.

Crockta greeted her, “... Hey, are you alive?”

“.....”

The elf didn’t respond and just walked through the door. Crockta shrugged. He had endured many cold winds blowing from women before.

Crockta opened the door and entered the bathroom. He decided to take a soak in the bathtub. The burning hot water sloshed against the thick skin of the burly orc. Crockta buried his body deep into the narrow bathtub and closed his eyes.

It was relaxing. He was an orc, so would he dream an orc’s dream? The distant scenery of Orcrox Fortress appeared as he lightly napped.

He saw Lenox, as well as Grant and Hoyt. He seemed to have a dream about fighting the enemy with a lot of orcs.

Crockta opened his eyes. His keen hearing had captured a small noise from across the bathroom wall and in the next room. He recalled the appearance of the female elf who he met before.

Smack lips. Slurp.

There was a noise. An unpleasant noise. He heard the sound of something chewing. Crockta left the bathtub and held his ear close to the bathroom wall.

Drip.

At that moment, a drop of water on the ceiling fell back towards the tub.

“Ohuum... um...”

He heard a groaning sound.

It was the sound of a pained scream that was being blocked by something, a familiar sound to Crockta. When he had struck at the Thawing Balhae Clan members, they would make this sound through the gag.

Crockta's eyes cooled.

He left the bathroom and roughly put on clothes before grabbing his greatsword. He killed the sound of his footsteps and approached the next room where the elf was. As he came closer, his ears could hear the subtle sound again.

“Hup... um...!”

The groaning became more vivid. Crockta immediately kicked at the door, breaking both the door and its latch wide open.

“.....!”

Crockta was speechless at the sight before him. An elf was lying on the floor with both of her arms bound. Another elf had their face buried in her thigh and was chewing on it. Blood flowed from the flesh.

“...Grr?”

The elf who was eating the thigh turned their gaze towards Crockta. The white part of their eyes was black, and their teeth were also extremely sharpened as if they weren't an elf's. More than anything else, her appearance was the same as the elf who was bound.

Doppelganger!

The doppelganger discovered Crockta and flashed a wicked grin and a mocking expression. Crockta's face distorted.

"Bul'tar!"

Crockta rushed forward and wielded the Ogre Slayer. The doppelganger retreated with bizarre movements that weren't like a human.

"Ufff...!"

The doppelganger did such rough movements using the elf's face. Crockta quickly squinted at the injured elf and pulled her towards him.

"Are you okay?"

"....."

The elf didn't reply, like she had fainted. Crockta placed the elf behind him and raised his greatsword. The doppelganger stared at him with mocking eyes. The moment that Crockta approached, the doppelganger turned around.

".....!"

It was like it was listening to something. Crockta didn't miss that small gap and jumped. He swung his greatsword, but the doppelganger avoided Crockta's attack with a strange elasticity that wasn't elf-like.

It hangs to the ceiling upside down like a spider.

".....!"

Crockta was confused but the doppelganger still had its head turned and was paying attention to something out the window.

“What are you looking at? Bring it on!” Crockta shouted.

The doppelganger spun its head. It hung upside down and its body didn't move at all, with only the neck turning in the opposite direction. Crockta got goosebumps as an elf showed such bizarre movements.

The doppelganger whispered, “Calling me...” It was a strange voice. “It is calling...”

Crockta waved his greatsword vertically towards the doppelganger on the ceiling. The doppelganger twisted its body to avoid it and fell to the floor. Then it broke the window and ran outside.

“This!”

Crockta looked out the window. The doppelganger landed on the ground. The black shadow of the doppelganger fell into the darkness of the city at a tremendous speed. Soon its appearance couldn't be seen anymore.

“.....!”

A truly bizarre monster. It was literally as Tiyo said: The doppelganger was a threat to Quantas. Ogres and doppelgangers. It definitely wasn't ordinary. What was going on in Quantas right now?

Crockta turned back to the elf, who had lost consciousness.

“Wake up.”

Crockta shook her. Then he could hear the sound of running. It seemed like people were coming due to the chaos of the fighting and the broken window. Crockta shouted.

“This way!”

The innkeeper wasn't the only one who appeared, since he had already called Quantas' garrison soldiers. Crockta beckoned.

“You came. This elf here was attacked by the doppelganger...”

“As expected from the outsider!”

The innkeeper cut off Crockta's words. Crockta shook his head. "There seems to be a misunderstanding. I didn't..."

"What are you doing? Arrest that orc!"

The gnomes of the Quantas garrison approached. None of them were the soldiers whom he had fought and played with during the day. The gnomes in uniform pointed guns, similar to the Asura Thousand Wave Artillery, at the harsh looking orc with nervous expressions on their faces.

"We will take you to jail. Come along obediently."

Crockta spoke again, "It is a misunderstanding. The doppelganger is..."

"....."

They stared at him with disbelieving eyes. Crockta sighed. He didn't want to cause any trouble. He had a connection with Tiyo and the other garrison members, so he decided to follow the procedure for now.

"You will know that you made a mistake once the elf wakes up. Please treat this elf quickly," Crockta said. He held out his hands without resisting and continued.

"There is a procedure so please follow it." The gnome soldiers handcuffed him.

"Of course, I respect you." Crockta grinned.



Thanks to the elf's testimony, Crockta was soon released but the sun was already rising. He had stayed all night in a narrow solitary confinement so his body was stiff. The gnome guards respectfully apologized. Crockta politely accepted their apology.

"You were just following procedure. I understand."

"I'm sorry."

Crockta shook hands with the gnome defenders and stepped outside. Quantas was lively in the morning. The gnomes that came up to Crockta's waist were busy coming and going. The gnomes were small in stature, so it was like a panoramic view.

He was looking around for a good restaurant when someone spoke to him, "Excuse me."

"Huh?"

It was the female elf that Crockta saved last night. She approached Crockta. "You saved me, right? I have been waiting to thank you."

Crockta thought as he watched her bow. Was the elf who opened the door with the key and ignored his greeting the real elf or the doppelganger?

The elf smiled gently at Crockta's stare. "I'm sorry for not responding to you the first time. I am a very shy person."

It was like this. Crockta nodded. "You don't have to thank me. Anyone else would've done it."

"Nobody else did it."

She had a limp, and there was a bandage around the portion of the thigh that was eaten by the doppelganger.

Crockta asked, "Are you okay?"

"Yes. It isn't a severe injury, thanks to you. Thank you."

"How did you get hit by the doppelganger?"

"I don't know. I walked into my room when someone who looked exactly like me popped out from the corner..." She shuddered. "I thought I was going to die."

"You were lucky. Be careful from now on."

"Orc, what is your name?"

"Crockta."

The elf's eyes widened. She didn't know the details, but it seemed like she had heard the name before.

“Ah, that...”

“What is your name?”

“I’m Eileen.”

After a quick conversation on the street, Eileen decided to treat Crockta to a meal. They headed to a nearby restaurant. Crockta ordered a thick steak while she ordered a salad.

“Are you going to the north?”

“I want to find the Temple of the Fallen God.”

“The Fallen God...” She didn’t know it. “It’s the first time I’ve heard of it, but the north is known as a dangerous place...”

“A warrior isn’t afraid of danger.”

“How great.”

“Why did you come to Quantas?”

“I am studying magical engineering at Quanta’s Academy.”

Crockta nodded. The gnomes’ skills in this field of research were world renowned. It wasn’t strange for people to study with them.

“In particular, I am studying artifacts that were recently excavated in Quantas.”

“Artifacts?”

“Yes. It is an ancient and mysterious legacy that can’t be created with today’s technology.”

Artifacts were more than just magic enchanted items. There were some users who obtained artifacts. However, after their existence was known, the users were killed and the artifacts were stolen. Then Eileen lowered her voice, “In particular, the thing discovered this time... it is a belt called the Demon’s Mouth.”

“Demon’s Mouth...?”

“Yes. The exact purpose of its existence hasn’t been revealed, but it is a strange thing that emits a dreadful aura. There are rumors that the researchers who first discovered it went mad when studying it.”

The Demon’s Mouth. Crockta was curious about it. But Eileen didn’t know the details either.

“Right now, the gnomes have sealed it, and are arguing if they should continue studying it or not... I wish I could continue my research. I came because of it.”

“I’m also curious. Let’s pray,” Crockta said as he chewed on his steak. It was oversized, but the amount was still small. However, the taste was wonderful.

Eileen asked, “Are you going to visit the academy today?”

“Hmm...”

Crockta planned to follow Tiyo’s advice and stop by the academy for information about the North. Crockta thought for a moment before nodding.

“I have no other plans so I will do so.”

“Then can I guide you around the academy?” Eileen said with a smile. Crockta nodded without any hesitation. Unlike her first impression, she was a moderately friendly elf.

“It is an honor. Please do so.”

“Huhu. It is nothing.”

Eileen bowed her head at Crockta’s reply.

At that moment... The system message that he hadn’t seen for a while popped up.

[You are doing very well!]

[Love Mode is currently locked. Do you want to activate Love Mode?]

CHAPTER 60

THE DEMON'S MOUTH (1)

There was a basic value in the world. Based on observation, there was usually a regular value that was commonly used. Therefore, people felt uncomfortable when another person suddenly showed a 'special' value outside of that.

"One Iced Americano."

"Yes, is a large size okay?" The boss of a cafe would ask.

Why bother not asking for a regular size first? Was it because he didn't know the meaning of regular? Or was it because it was a negotiation psychology? Or maybe the person looked like someone who couldn't say 'no?'

Crockta felt like that at this moment.

'Love Mode is currently locked. Do you want to activate Love Mode?'

Was this question even necessary? Wasn't it the same as asking, 'Are you human?'

What a frustrating question! Crockta answered decisively.



Crockta and Eileen headed to Quantas Academy.

It was a huge facility located in the center of Quantas and was the home of magical engineering research. All different types of works were being developed here. The Asura Thousand Wave Artillery, the core of the Quantas garrison, was created here.

The first person they visited was a creature specialist. Due to Quantas being right next to the north, the gnomes often encountered many creatures, which was why creature research was actively carried out in Quantas.

The gnome creatures specialist fixed his glasses and asked, "You're going to the north?"

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I want to visit the Temple of the Fallen God.”

“The Fallen God, hrmm...”

Doctor Gnome swept back the white hair on his head. His body was small, but the wrinkles around his eyes made him seem like a twilight gnome that had lived for a long time.

“The Fallen God... It has been a long time since I’ve heard that name.”

“Do you know it?” Crockta asked.

The Temple of the Fallen God was known to a certain extent, but no one was able to correctly answer what it was.

“I don’t know exactly what it is, I’ve only heard the name.” The Doctor Gnome buried himself deeply in his chair. “Please sit down. My neck will hurt from just looking up at you.”

This was the laboratory of Doctor Gnome, a creatures specialist. Crockta and Eileen sat down on the chairs in front of Doctor Gnome’s desk.

“For the Fallen God, the theological professors would know better than me, so you should ask them instead. I just know creatures.”

“I understand. What type of species live in the north?”

Doctor Gnome laughed. “Orcs like you.”

“Huh?”

“Orcs live beyond the forest that separates the north and the rest of the continent.”

The reason why the northern territory was an object of fear was due to the Forest of Creatures. Few people survived when they entered the forest, but not much was known beyond that fact. It was the first time he had heard that orcs lived beyond the

forest.

“Orcs and dark elves. There are also many species that don’t exist on the continent.”

“.....”

“But right now, you should be more worried about what is in the forest than what is beyond it. That forest... Ogres are considered just ordinary monsters in there.”

Doctor Gnome opened a thick book on his desk.

“In particular, it has become strange recently. It is unprecedented for them to charge at Quantas like they have been these days... Those guys are too violent. Thus, it is far more dangerous right now. This is a book that I wrote, so look at the chapter on the north.”

Crockta took the book. The table of contents allowed him to roughly learn about the north. Ogres, trolls, wyverns, great worms, hydras, undead and other evil beings were listed in the index.

Crockta frowned. It was too diverse.

“That is a lot. Umm...” Crockta handed the book back, but the doctor refused.

“I don’t need it right now, so you can take it.”

“Huh?”

“This is a reward for protecting Quantas, Ogre Slayer Crockta.” Doctor Gnome laughed. The news that Crockta had repelled the ogres with the gnome garrison had already spread. “Captain Tiyo told me. A great orc warrior.”

“It is undeserved praise.”

“Once upon a time, orcs and gnomes had a good relationship. The big and strong orc, and the small, but clever, gnomes. They helped each other, but that changed over time. That’s why this is good.”

Doctor Gnome smiled.

“Be careful when you venture into the north, as the creatures there are strong. I hope that you arrive safely at the Temple of the Fallen God, and that you find what you wish. I don’t know what you’re looking for there.”

“Thank you.”

“If you want to know about the Fallen God, then please visit this gnome.”

Doctor Gnome wrote something with a feather pen and handed the paper to Crockta. It contained the name of a theology professor, Doctor Eyona. On it was her address and a simple signature from Doctor Gnome.

“She is enjoying a sabbatical right now, so please visit her. If you say that I sent you, she will be quite happy.”

“Thank you.”

Crockta asked Doctor Gnome a few more questions about the north. The most striking story that he heard in return was about the origin of the forest. According to legend, it was originally an ordinary forest; however, an evil spirit died there, causing the evil aura to gradually grow bigger until the forest separated the north from the rest of the continent.

Crockta nodded his head. “Thank you for the help.”

“I’m really honored to have helped a famous warrior.”

Crockta shook hands with Doctor Gnome. Eileen smiled as she watched them. It was around lunchtime when they left Doctor Gnome’s laboratory. Eileen asked, “Crockta, do you want to go see the Demon’s Mouth that I told you about?”

“Can I see it?”

She nodded. “A friend of mine works there, so he can give us a tour. How about it?”

“Okay. I’m also curious.”

“This might be the last chance. I don’t know when it will be permanently sealed.”

The gnomes who gave up on a topic of research would permanently seal it.

Crockta and Eileen walked away from the laboratory. The gnomes at the academy were surprised to pass by the unusual combination of an orc and elf. In some cases, the gnomes would gossip about Crockta.

“That orc, is he Crockta?”

“That is a big sword. I heard that he suddenly came and slaughtered the ogres with the guards.”

“He looks different from what I expected.”

“Is that his girlfriend?”

“The best warrior has an elf girlfriend.”

The appearance of the orc warrior Crockta and the beautiful elf Eileen stood out among the small gnomes. They received a lot of attention as they headed to a special facility on the campus of the Quantas Academy.

There were guards present at the entrance of the special facility in order to control access.

“Stop! Stop!”

“Reveal your identities!”

The soldiers restrained them before Eileen took out a pass.

“I am Eileen from Ariel Academy.”

“Ah, a researcher dispatched to this city. Then, the orc next to you?”

“My guest. I will take responsibility for him.”

“I understand. Pass!”

The Quantas garrison soldiers were there to defend against theft. They opened the way. A gnome greeted them as they entered the special institute.

“Ohh! Eileen! You came!”

“Deco!”

It was a male gnome. His eyes widened as he discovered Crockta. “Excuse me, that orc...?”

“I am giving him a tour. I will be thankful for any minute you can spare.”

Crockta extended his hand. “I am alive. I am called Crockta.”

“Ah, hello. I am Deco.”

Deco was smiling, but he didn’t seem that happy. Deco threw a strange glance towards Crockta, who inwardly laughed. Eileen said to Deco, “The Demon’s Mouth, can you show it to us?”

“No outsiders. It is okay with just you, but both of you...”

He refused with a sullen expression. Eileen approached and placed a hand on Deco’s shoulder.

“I’m asking you Deco. Yes?”

“Ohhh...”

“Can’t we see it for a second?”

“U... Understood. But hold on a second.”

“Thank you.”

Eileen smiled sweetly. Deco turned his head away. Crockta chuckled lowly as he watched the man and woman before him.

They walked down the corridor and arrived at a firmly closed door. Warnings signs were drawn all over, as well as the words stating that entry was forbidden for those without permission.

“Place this around your neck.”

It was a necklace with divine power contained in it. Each of them received one. There

was an unknown refreshing feeling coming from the necklace.

“Is this much necessary?”

“It is quiet right now, but you never know.” Deco grabbed the knocker. “Now, we will enter.”

The door opened.

A seemingly ordinary belt made of steel was lying in the middle of the lab with various experimental instruments lined up around it. Crockta’s eyes were caught by the darkness surrounding the belt. It felt like he made eye contact with something.

“.....”

He seemed to hear an unknown whisper in the darkness.

“That...”

“The Demon’s Mouth.”

Deco walked. The belt had a transparent wall blocking access to it. There were bright lights that shone and got rid of the darkness in the room. Nevertheless, Crockta felt an extreme darkness from the belt.

“That... it eats.”

“Eats?” Eileen asked.

Deco squirmed and said, “Literally. It eats.”

“Eats what?”

“Anything alive.”

Eileen’s eyes widened. In the middle of the belt were strong steel points that looked like teeth, giving it the name of ‘Demon’s Mouth.’

“The center of the belt opens and eats things. A gnome has already been eaten.”

“Oh my god...”

If so, this wasn't an artifact, but an evil creature.

“The identity of it... is unknown. That is why we were studying it.”

Crockta looked at the Demon's Mouth and started thinking. What would happen if he wore that thing? Would it turn its master into a demon that desired blood? He got a chill and formed a fist at the words.

The door behind them opened.

“Eh?” It was a female gnome researcher. “This is a restricted area...”

Deco gathered both hands together and laughed. “I'm sorry, I just wanted to quickly show it to my friends. Please overlook it this once.”

The female gnome alternated looking between Crockta and Eileen before giving a strange smile. “I understand. I'll overlook it this time. I'm sorry, but it's time for an inspection now.”

“Inspection time?” Deco tilted his head. “I understand. Eileen, let's leave.”

Deco bowed to the female gnome and directed Eileen and Crockta outside. Crockta was about to leave the laboratory by following Deco.

“.....”

Something whispered to Crockta.

“.....!”

Crockta turned around. The Demon's Mouth was still enduring the light pouring on it. Crockta confirmed the appearance of the gnome researcher walking towards the Demon's Mouth. Her gait was slightly strange and somehow familiar.

Suddenly, Crockta stopped.

“...Crockta?”

Eileen called him from the doorway. Crockta looked at the female gnome without answering. He grabbed the handle of his greatsword.

“Call the guards.”

“Huh?”

“Right now!”

Crockta shouted loudly. At the same time, the head of the female gnome turned around 180°.

Grotesque movements, and a mocking smile on her face. Doppelganger. The female gnome smiled before turning her head back to the front and starting to run. Crockta also rushed towards the doppelganger.

“That is a doppelganger!”

“.....!”

Eileen and Deco panicked. It was at that moment that an alarm started to sound in the laboratory.

“Everybody evacuate! Evacuate!” Someone shouted from the end of the corridor. It was the voice of the guards. “A wyvern has appeared and the academy is being attacked by monsters! Run away. Evacuate! This is an emergency situation! We must evacuate now!”

Eileen called out to Crockta, “Crockta!”

Crockta didn’t look back. Deco tugged at the hem of her clothes.

“Eileen! We have to run away!”

“But Crockta...”

She could see Crockta aiming his greatsword towards the doppelganger. The doppelganger was stuck to the transparent wall like it was being drawn towards the Demon’s Mouth.

“Crockta!”

The door of the laboratory closed. The inside of the laboratory couldn't be seen anymore. Eileen was dragged out by Deco. Her mouth gaped open as the scenery of the academy was revealed.

“Oh my god!”

“Unbelievable...”

Eileen and Deco moaned at the same time. There were monsters were walking around the academy campus, trolls chasing after the gnomes, and ogres aiming their clubs at their surroundings.

Kuuong!

A troll dropped from the sky. They raised their heads. Wyverns were flying around in the sky. Wyverns were flying from far away and dropping monsters on the academy.

“Oh my...”

“This is impossible.”

It was a sight they were seeing for the first time. After they finished transporting the goods, the wyverns descended to the ground to look for their prey. They captured gnomes and flew them up into the sky.

“Steady yourself!”

The guards led Eileen and Deco to a safe place, but they were soon blocked by creatures.

“.....!”

A troll carrying a stone axe drooled at them.

“We need to get through! Shoot!”

The defenders lifted their magic guns and fired, but that firepower wasn't enough to kill the troll. As the troll stalled them, an ogre was drawn by the sound of the gunshots.

The ogre lifted the broken debris of a building, a massive piece of rock, and took a position to throw it at the group.

“.....!”

Despair filled Eileen and Deco’s eyes.

At that moment...

A ray of light struck the ogre in the back.

“Kuweeeh!”

The ogre fell down with the rock falling on it. Eileen looked back and saw a small gnome pointing a long gun from a distance.

“That will sting you!”

It was Captain Tiyo, the symbol of the Quantas’ Gnomes Garrison.

CHAPTER 61

THE DEMON'S MOUTH (2)

Crockta struck down with the Ogre Slayer, which doppelganger turned and avoided.

The greatsword hit the transparent wall.

Kaaang!

It was cracked, but not broken. It truly was gnome technology. Crockta turned back towards the doppelganger.

“What the hell are you?”

The doppelganger just laughed. It had the body of a gnome, but its joints were distorted, like it wasn't really a gnome. The doppelganger's face was still in the air, but its body was moving around the wall, blocking it.

The corners of the doppelganger's mouth went up as it whispered, “It is calling...”

Crockta once again swung his greatsword. The doppelganger jumped up high. It was in an instant. A tremendous speed. The doppelganger climbed on top of the barrier that was sealing the Demon's Mouth and looked down at Crockta. The orc grasped the handle of his greatsword.

“What is calling you?”

The doppelganger opened its mouth. Crockta hesitated since he expected an answer, but the doppelganger spewed out a green liquid instead. Crockta blocked it with his greatsword. The blade blocked most of it, but he still felt pain from his right shoulder where the liquid had hit. His flesh started melting.

“Dammit!”

His body shook. It was a truly awful monster.

Crockta stepped back. It was so fast that he couldn't catch it with his skills. He would

need to make the doppelganger come to him.

“This?”

Crockta pointed to the Demon’s Mouth with his greatsword.

“Is this your aim?”

The eyes of the doppelganger turned strangely. Its face turned back, its eyes turned upside down , and its mouth went up. *Spin*. It moved like it didn’t have a rigid body. The upside down face of the doppelganger laughed.

Crockta’s mouth distorted as he swung his greatsword at the barrier.

Kaaaang!

He wielded it once again.

Kaaang!

The cracks on the barrier gradually widened. Crockta’s attacks caused the cracks to widen even further. The eyes of the doppelganger kept spinning.

Crockta spat out, “If this is your purpose, I will bring it to you.”

Crockta stabbed Ogre Slayer into the largest gap and twisted it. The barrier wall collapsed and air rushed into the interior. The moment that Crockta pulled his greatsword from the remnants of the barrier, his heart started pounding.

An unknown aura leaked out from the hole in the barrier. It was so dark that he had trouble breathing.

“Kiyaaaaah!”

The doppelganger emitted a baleful scream as it rushed towards Crockta.

“Bul’tar...!”

He brandished his greatsword, its blade cutting at the doppelganger’s body. It flew to the other side of the barrier with a yelp and sagged on the floor. The skin broke apart

and revealed red blood.

Its interior organs, that weren't at all like a gnome's, were shown. It was a bizarre creature. The doppelganger's eyes turned red. It stretched out a flurry tentacles that resembled a spider's legs and crawled towards Crockta. It grew beyond the threshold of a gnome's body and fired even more green fluids at its adversary.

"Kuok!"

Crockta avoided it. The doppelganger's fluid passed by Crockta and touched the Demon's Mouth.

Shaaaaaah...

The darkness moved at once. Crockta couldn't believe his eyes.

Darkness was the absence of light, but right now the darkness was swallowing up the light and filling up the interior with darkness. The light source emitting the light was buried under the darkness.

His field of view started becoming dimmer.

"What..."

Crockta looked back. The corrosive liquid sprayed by the doppelganger was now cradling the cursed belt. It gradually melted and entered the Demon's Mouth. The Demon's Mouth closed together.

Jingle.

The Demon's Mouth fell to the ground with a loud sound.

".....!"

Beyond the dim darkness, the Demon's Mouth seemed to move.

Crockta thought that he was imagining it, but the belt really was moving. Cracks started to form at the steel teeth in the center of the belt, revealing black insides that seemed to be chewing on something.

“Kiyaaaaah...”

The doppelganger made a strange sound resembling laughter.

Crockta was gripped by an instinctive fear. He seemed to be surrounded by two evil monsters. He had to leave this place. In particular, the newly awakened demon started to emit a demonic aura that he couldn't afford to deal with. He thought that he was going to suffocate.

“Dammit!”

Crockta turned around. Crockta rushed towards the door of the laboratory in a strategic retreat. The doppelganger blocked Crockta by shooting its strange tentacle along the ground, its face still smiling. Crockta felt an instinctive loathing as he stabbed his greatsword downwards.

“Kiyaaaaah!”

The doppelganger dodged the attack at a tremendous speed.

Crockta kicked at the entrance. It didn't open.

“Dammit!”

It was a structure that required pulling from the inside. He grabbed the knocker and looked at the doppelganger again. That creature was now crawling towards the Demon's Mouth like it didn't care about Crockta.

He didn't want to see any more of the darkness, buried in the Demon's Mouth, that the doppelganger was heading towards. Crockta bit his lip and opened the door of the laboratory.

He started running away from the laboratory. A frightening scream was heard from behind him.

“Kiyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Corckta used a lot of effort to turn away. He ran like crazy and arrived at the entrance

of the facility. The landscape outside was revealed.

Crockta's mouth fell open.

Pandemonium. Hell.

The bodies of gnomes were flying through the air. An ogre had the limb of a gnome in its mouth, and the wyvern was munching on pieces of bodies. The trolls were giggling as they beat at dead bodies with their clubs. Blood and flesh were scattered.

Screams were coming from all over the academy. Crockta raised his greatsword.

How did this happen? At that moment, something fell.

Kuuong!

It was a troll. Crockta looked up at the sky. Wyverns were carrying creatures. Crockta groaned. It was an incredible sight.

He could hear gunshots from the gnome soldiers, but they were gradually stopping. In the place where the sound of shooting stopped, screams filled the empty silence.

"Crockta!"

Someone called to him.

"...Tiyo!"

Captain Tiyo of the Quantas Garrison ran over to Crockta with his long rifle. "Fortunately, you are alive *dot!*"

"How did this happen?"

"I'm not sure *dot!* Creatures suddenly came from the sky...!"

Crockta's expression distorted as he heard Tiyo's explanation. Evil creatures had started to attack the academy through a strange manner that had never been seen before. It was like something was calling them.

Crockta's head started whirling as he looked at Tiyo. The words he heard in Quantas

kept popping up one by one.

‘These days, many creatures are pouring from the north *dot*.’

‘In particular, the thing discovered this time... it is a belt called the Demon’s Mouth.’

‘Right now, the gnomes have sealed it, and are arguing if they should continue studying it or not...’

‘In particular, it has become strange recently. It is unprecedented for them to charge at Quantas like they have been these days... Those guys are too violent.’

‘It is calling...’

Crockta looked at the special research building that he just ran out of. It wasn’t just a building now, but a cave encased in darkness. His instincts were telling him that he had to go back. In order to resolve this situation, he had to face it.

However, his feet wouldn’t move. He was afraid of the darkness spreading over the entrance of the institute.

“Crockta! We have to move *dot*! Go *dot*!” Tiyo prompted.

Crockta’s attention was drawn to a small gnome running outside the academy. Crockta asked, “Can you stop them?”

“The guards will be mobilized *dot*! But...”

Tiyo’s voice trailed off.

It was only through the combination of the walls and the Asura Thousand Wave Artillery that had allowed them to stop the monsters from the north. It wasn’t easy to block creatures that had fallen inside of the walls. Maybe the worst would happen.

“...We will do our best.”

“I understand.”

Crockta struggled with his ominous feeling as he ran next to Tiyo.

A group of gnomes, made up of academy researchers and guards, was hiding while moving. Crockta and Tiyo rushed to join them.

“Uwooooo...!”

An ogre noticed them and charged towards them, scattering the wreckage of the buildings. The civilian gnomes shrieked.

Then Tiyo’s artifact, ‘General’, fired. The white flash of light pierced the ogre.

“Kuoooooh!”

The ogre staggered against a building. Tiyo continued to fire his rifle. The white flashes stopped the ogres. Sweat started dripping down Tiyo’s head. Unlike the other magic firearms that were charged using magic stones, ‘General’ consumed Tiyo’s energy and magic power.

Tiyo shouted, “Run away quickly!”

The gnomes were still in chaos. Tiyo shouted again, loudly this time. As he looked desperate, Crockta swung his greatsword.

“Bul’tarrrrrrrrrrr—————!”

The orc’s battle cry resonated through the center of Quantas! Crushing Roar trampled on the ogre’s spirit as he leaped towards the confused ogre. His greatsword pierced the ogre’s thick skin.

The ogre collapsed. It tried to grab him, but Crockta hacked at it with his greatsword. After being struck by the greatsword many times, the ogre finally vomited out blood and became silent. Crockta pulled his greatsword from the ogre’s body and placed it on his shoulder, blood flowing down his sides.

The image of an orc warrior covered in the blood of an ogre thrilled the gnomes. However, this turmoil called more enemies as Ogres started to emerge from other buildings. They discovered Crockta standing over the body of the ogre and roared in anger.

“Kuoooooh!”

The ogres rushed like crazy, the trolls running along with them. The wyverns drooled as they circled above him in the sky.

Crockta started laughing.

This battlefield was absurd. How likely was the possibility of victory? Any commander would be silent and pray for luck in the war. Maybe their defeat was confirmed.

Tiyo called out to him, "Crockta!"

"Take the civilians to the red building! There is an emergency bunker in the basement *dot*! Wait there until the reinforcements come!"

Tiyo and the guards stood side by side.

"What about you?"

"I will build a defensive line here *dot*."

It was quite far away from the bunker, but somebody had to stop them. They only made a line here due to the narrow terrain.

"I will fight with you."

"I don't need it *dot*." Tiyo grinned. "Crockta is Quantess' guest! It is the duty of our Quantess Garrison to defend it, so don't get in the way."

Tiyo placed General on his shoulders and the guards also prepared their magic power. Several ogres were running. Wyverns sat on top of buildings and flashed their sharp teeth.

"Go quickly Crockta! Once again, I am delighted to welcome a guest to the beautiful city of Quantess *dot*."

Tiyo laughed. Crockta thought he was a funny person with a gun, but he cracked a joke in such a dangerous moment. There were those types of people, the type to crack dark jokes before the end.

"What are you standing around for, Crockta? Go sightseeing!" Tiyo shouted as he aimed General.

The defensive line opened fire towards the creatures. Colorful streams of light hit the enemies. The civilian gnomes started running in the direction of the bunker.

Crockta nodded. "I understand. Please take care of this place, Tiyo."

"Yes!" Tiyo yelled out in response.

"...Eh?"

The orc warrior Crockta started to run in a direction away from the bunker.

"What..."

Crockta's body instantly disappeared. The place that Crockta was heading was the special facility that was now tinged black.



The wind and the sound of moaning. The sound of flesh being eaten in the darkness.

Crockta walked inside.

It hadn't changed from when he entered with Eileen, but it seemed like a completely different place. It felt like he was stepping foot into a place where he wasn't invited to. Darkness spread between him and his goal as it whispered to Crockta.

The meaning was unknown, but it was definitely evil. Dark and moist. A laughing corruption.

Crockta felt like he was walking inside of a cave.

Why had he come here?

He just didn't like Tiyo's actions. Those who pretended to be cool in such a way would regret it later as they died.

The level of civilization in Quantas was good, and there weren't many places in Elder Lord with such development in technology. A city where each room had a warm bath, where the restaurants sold delicious steaks, and where the knowledge and developments were continued in a modern academy, deserved to be preserved.

He wanted to kill that doppelganger bastard. Crockta would slaughter it with his sword. It had crawled around and laughed when it attacked Eileen, and also at the academy incident. Now Crockta would tear its face apart with his greatsword.

He stood at the entrance of the lab.

Crockta smiled. Yes, that was the biggest reason.

‘It’ was calling him.

He kicked open the door.

It was distant. Darkness filled the inside of the laboratory like the lights were turned off. It was a darkness that seemed to enter his body every time he inhaled. From then on, something whispered in his ears.

‘Come.’

Crockta walked forward. At that moment, two lights appeared in the darkness. They were eyes. Crockta could see that it was the doppelganger. However, it didn’t move in its normal bizarre manner. It approached Crockta like it was an empty doll.

Chobeok. Chobeok.

The doppelganger extended something to Crockta.

It was ‘it.’ Crockta looked at the doppelganger, which was no longer alive. The doppelganger was consumed by ‘it.’

It whispered to Crockta.

.....

Demons liked gambling and sweet temptation. They laughed as they swallowed the duped humans. How about this time?

Right now, Quantess’ fate was up to him. Their survival was on his shoulders.

The bonus stage. Maybe it was the final stage. Would he accept or turn around?

Crockta responded, “You cocky bastard.”

Crockta laughed and placed ‘it’ on his waist.

CHAPTER 62

THE DEMON'S MOUTH (3)

Crockta walked through the darkness, moving downwards every time he took a step. It was like sinking into a dark swamp.

Crockta stared at the darkness that was surrounding him. Gradually, his footsteps became heavy and the darkness that couldn't be repulsed swallowed his whole body. Moans were heard inside the darkness. An abyss.

His flesh would be erased. Only his spirit moved in the darkness. He couldn't tell if he was seeing darkness, or if his vision was so broken that he couldn't recognize anything. He felt drowsy.

Then someone said.

'The world is a parabola.'

A single ray of light emerged in the darkness. It was small and slender, like a firefly, as it moved in a gentle curve.

'Everything that rises will eventually sink.'

The light fell down. There were no traces of it left. It became dark again like there had been nothing there from the beginning.

'It is small.'

'It blows away like dust in a void.'

Crockta was standing now. He raised his gaze. It was a battlefield.

'That is the world.'

The sky was red. The ground was black. In this place where the boundary between heaven and earth were broken, many people were killed. Orcs and humans rushed towards each other in a confrontation. It was a strange war filled with the living and

the dead.

A human screamed in pain. His head flew through the air. The orc who cut at him roared. Then a sword was stuck in the back of his head.

Blades crossed. There was a rain of blood.

Gradually, it started moving further away. The terrible battlefield moved further towards the horizon. The continent was seen on the horizon and then the sea was seen. The outline of a round planet appeared.

It was the view of a star that didn't care about the cries of small beings. But the view kept on endlessly expanding.

The galaxy. The endless darkness and dust of the galaxy appeared.

The universe. Everything faded for a while. Even that just became a dot.

'The world is just an empty place.'

Life and death were just fleeting moments. Crockta's soul rattled as the darkness and void enveloped his mind. Depression, emptiness, and resignation pulled him towards hell. He kept falling. Even this rise and fall was pointless.

Suddenly, someone called out to him, "Oppa, what are you doing?"

Jung Ian shook his head.

"Huh?"

Jung Ian looked around. This was Café Reason. Ah, that's right. After finishing school, Jung Yiyu had come to the café to play and asked him for a latte. For a moment, he had a different thought. Jung Yiyu narrowed her eyes.

"What were you thinking?"

"Uhh... nothing."

"You should focus, Boss," Jung Yiyu said with a smile. Ian laughed.

Then her face melted and her flesh dripped down her chin. As Jung Ian looked at her, she became a skeleton.

“Ah...”

Jung Ian freaked out and retreated.

‘When it comes to life, everything sinks eventually.’

The skeletal Jung Yiyu cocked her head. Jung Ian staggered as he could no longer control his body. Suddenly, a voice was heard from next to him, “Boss, what are you doing now?”

It was Han Yeori’s voice. Jung Ian stuttered as he grabbed her arm.

“Yeori, you see, now, Yiyu...”

His fingers touched something cold. His head became blank as a collection of white bones smiled at him.

“Yes?”

‘I see life and I laugh death and I cry. Life is truly a fleeting moment while death is an eternity.’

Jung Ian froze as the world came tumbling down. In the infinite time, he sank into eternal darkness.

Life.

An unlimited void caught up. He held onto his hair as he shook his head and stared into the core of darkness.

‘Look.’

‘This is the world.’

The boundaries were crumbling. Once again, Crockta stood in the darkness.

The Demon’s Mouth was smiling at his waist. A perverted consciousness that melted

in with the darkness. He had to overcome it. No, winning or losing was pointless at this moment, as any thoughts fled into the emptiness of the void.

Crockta dropped his head.

The 'it' on his waist constantly whispered to him about the notion of emptiness. The malice and emptiness mixed up in his head. It felt like his body was going to burst. His blood vessels enlarged and he vomited.

Crockta's soul screamed.

'The world is a void.'



Tiyo ran towards the bunker with the defenders.

All of a sudden, the ogres had become silent. The wyverns stopped. The creatures stood still and looked somewhere. Despite his confusion, Tiyo quickly led the guards. The defenders moved in unison under his leadership.

"The creatures have become silent all of a sudden! This is an opportunity *dot!*"

"Evacuate!"

The gnomes ran. They were approaching the building where the bunker was located when the ground shook.

Kuuong!

The running gnomes lost their balance and fell. Only Tiyo barely managed to keep his balance as he encouraged the soldiers. He looked behind him. Something was walking towards them.

The person was big but smaller than an ogre. He looked familiar but also strange. Green skin, a tough face, and tough body. He was holding a greatsword. It was Crockta. But Tiyo instinctively recoiled. It was Crockta's shape but he looked different. An unknown dark aura was coming from him.

Crockta's eyes were tinged red. Creatures like ogres and trolls were walking behind

him. The wyverns hovered over Crockta's head and made a bizarre sound. Crockta pointed towards Tiyo and the gnome garrison.

Then the creatures started to rush at them. The ground shook as the ogres rushed towards them. The gnomes couldn't regroup so they failed to resist.

Tiyo also dropped the muzzle of General. Resistance was futile.

The ogres surrounded the gnomes. They opened a path. Crockta was walking over from the distance. As if he was the ruler, the creatures moved according to his gestures. Tiyo discovered the belt around Crockta's waist.

".....!"

Everything made sense. That was the problem. It was due to the cursed artifact that all the monsters became wild and invaded the city. Crockta discovered it first and tried to fight against the Demon's Mouth for Quantas, but he was eaten by it.

Tiyo gritted his teeth as he grasped General. The muzzle flashed before the ogres could react. However, Crockta instantly swung the greatsword and blocked the magic bullet. The bullets were deflected.

An ogre waved its hand.

"Ack!"

Tiyo's small body flew through the air at the ogre's punch. He didn't let the queasiness stop him from raising his head. The orc was looking down at him. Crockta's red eyes weren't those of the honorable warrior Crockta that he knew.

"Grrrrr..."

He had been devoured by the evil of the artifact. He raised his greatsword. Tiyo closed his eyes.

The moment that the greatsword was about to fall,

"We are orcs... The mighty orcs..."

The greatsword hesitated. Tiyo kept singing.

“The great warriors have appeared...”

It was the orc sound that Crockta had drunkenly sung for Tiyo and the Quantes garrison. It was beyond ridiculous.

“Humans get lost, elves get lost, dwarves get lost... Gnomes...”

Crockta’s greatsword trembled. Tiyo opened his eyes. Crockta’s distorted face was visible.

Tiyo laughed, “What are you doing Crockta?”

“.....”

“Don’t you have to go somewhere?”

The greatsword paused in the air and didn’t move. It shook like he was fighting something invisible. Soon, the steel teeth on the belt at Crockta’s waist started moving.

The teeth slowly opened. Since there was a crisis, the belt was trying to swallow the foolish gnome that shook its host.

The moment that the steel teeth moved to cover the gnome. The greatsword moved.



Crockta groaned from within the abyss.

The demon within the Demon’s mouth constantly whispered to him. Everything he deemed important was collapsing. The demon fed on his despair and dominated his body. He was faintly aware that he was trying to kill Tiyo with his greatsword. But Crockta thought that it might be better.

People would just die anyway. However, Crockta temporarily regained control of his body as the greatsword moved towards Tiyo’s body. He resisted the demon but it continued to whisper things to Crockta.

His soul was suffering. Physical pain was nothing compared to the pain of the soul. Crockta’s spirit was broken. The demon at his waist opened and was trying to swallow Tiyo.

Crockta moaned.

“Strength.” Crockta kept repeating it. “Don’t give in.”

“Whoever, please give me strength.”

At that moment, a brilliant light burst out. It was a radiance that seemed to blind him. Crockta closed his eyes. Then he opened them again. There was a familiar face standing in front of them.

“Ah...?”

“Hey, it’s been a while, Crockta.”

It was him, the hawk of the north. The blue guardian of the sunrise. The pale blue standard bearer who guided the shamans. The orc shaman mentor.

It was Tashaquil.

“You?”

“You’ve been doing great things. Kulkulkul.”

Tashaquil waved his staff. The world became still. It was the same for the Demon’s Mouth and the fallen Tiyo before him. It was like looking at a stalled scene from the perspective of a third party.

“Tashaquil, how are you here?”

“Don’t be surprised. I’m not Tashaquil. It is like a residual piece he left behind... In reality, I am probably at Orcrox or Basque Village.” He laughed as he touched the Demon’s Mouth with his staff. “Have you forgotten? I gave you a power the day you left Orcrox.”

The memory of that day was revived. Tashaquil had cast a spell when Crockta was saying goodbye to him.

“Tashaquil has granted you an unknown power.”

“The unidentified power will settle within your body.”

‘One day it will help you.’

Now he remembered. Crockta asked, “Tashaquil, what should I do now?”

“Let’s see... I don’t know.”

“Huh?”

Tashaquil laughed, “Actually, it was a lie.”

“Huh?”

“There is no power in this spell to help you Crockta.”

“.....”

Tashaquil waved his staff and smiled. “Just when the time comes, I am supposed to tell you what you want to hear.”

“Tell me what I want to hear?”

“That’s right.”

Crockta still had no idea.

“What do you want me to say?”

“I...”

“If you want to be comfortable, you can relax your mind.” He pointed to the Demon’s Mouth and said. “That is too strong. You have done your best so you can rest comfortably. What about this?”

He seemed to be laughing. Crockta frowned and asked, “What are you talking about?”

“Oh, that wasn’t it?”

“No.”

“If it isn’t...” Tashaquil swung his staff and hit Crockta’s head.

“Ouch!”

“Then I can say only one thing.”

“What is it?”

“It’s the same if I were any other orc. There is only one word I can give you now.”

Didn’t he already know it? Tashaquil laughed. Crockta raised his gaze.

“Listen carefully.”

“Yes.”

“I’ll only say it once.”

“I understand.”

Crockta listened closely. Then Tashaquil spoke.



Just like it was alive, the demon’s teeth protruded from the steel belt and prepared to bite Tiyo’s throat. Crockta’s greatsword struck it.

Kakang!

The Demon’s Mouth twisted. Then the steel teeth twisted and gave a strange shout. It was a terrible cry that sounded like it came from purgatory. Then the belt twisted like a snake and aimed at Crockta.

Crockta stretched out and grabbed it. The steel teeth chewed in vain in front of Crockta’s face. Furious noises kept coming from it. But Crockta just smiled.

“Are you afraid of the void?” Crockta asked. The Demon’s Mouth made a strange sound and tried to bite Crockta. “Are you afraid of the death that you will meet someday?”

Kaaaaaaah!

“Is that why you tease people like this?”

The Demon's Mouth bit Crockta's arm. Crockta groaned but didn't let it go. Crockta swallowed back the pain and said.

"I will give you the answer that you want to hear."

Darkness emerged from the Demon's Mouth and covered Crockta. His vision became dark. Crockta faced the darkness once again. The darkness vibrated and threatened Crockta, but Crockta didn't waver.

Then he said, "The world isn't a void."

It stopped. The darkness became thinner.

Crockta continued speaking, "Even if the world will end someday, life isn't meaningless."

The darkness shouted, 'What do you mean?'

"Isn't this the answer that you wanted to hear?"

Crockta stared at the other side of the darkness. Now he could see it clearly. It hid in the darkness and yelled, but it was actually crouching down from fear. It witnessed the end of the world, the darkness of the universe, and became frightened by it.

"I will tell you again. Death isn't the end."

It turned to face Crockta. It said, 'Prove it.'

"How?"

'You tell me!' It stood up and shouted at Crockta, like a young child of the darkness.

"Do you want to know?"

It didn't answer. Crockta said, "Then follow me."

'What?'

"If you follow me, then I will prove it."

‘.....’

Crockta spoke firmly.

“My life.”

It tilted its head. A fine movement. Crockta stared into its eyes. Then he spoke again, “I will prove it with my life.”

Crockta had seen it. The dark side of reality. A demon in despair.

It smiled. And...

The darkness was lifted.



As the darkness around Crockta was lifted, the Demon’s Mouth threatening Crockta couldn’t be seen. It closed its mouth and returned to being a normal steel belt at Crockta’s waist.

Crockta asked, “Make them go away.”

The belt twitched like it was unhappy and emitted a strange sound. Then the creatures stopped moving. The wyverns grabbed the ogres and trolls and left by air. It was a stunning sight. All the creatures turned and started leaving Quantas.

Then system messages popped up.

[The Despairing Demon’s Belt (Hero) has come under your jurisdiction.]

[You still can’t control the power of the belt. The power of the belt has been limited.]

[The demon is sleeping.]

Crockta looked down at Tiyo who was still on the ground. Tiyo looked up at Crockta.

“Have you recovered your mind?”

“Of course.”

“I’m glad *dot*.”

Crockta grabbed Tiyo’s hand. Tiyo got up.

“Crockta.”

“Huh?”

Tiyo said, “I want to go to the north with Crockta, *dot*.”

CHAPTER 63

BECOMING A RANKER (1)

The Demon's Mouth situation was solved by Crockta.

Crockta was awarded a medal of honor by the mayor of Quantas. The ceremony was held in the main building of the Quantas garrison because Crockta refused a large event. The mayor of Quantas was an intelligent looking gnome wearing glasses. He coughed as he looked up at Crockta, who was much taller than himself.

"Orc Crockta!"

"Yes."

"For your accomplishments in this event, I present to you, a Quantas medal of honor."

The guards applauded. The mayor of Quantas placed the medal on Crockta's chest on top of Crockta's leather armor. He bowed his head and the mayor jumped back as his face became level to the Demon's Mouth around Crockta's waist.

"Ah!" The mayor looked shocked for a moment before fixing his glasses and clearing his throat. "Hmm hmm! Ahem! Crockta! The citizens of Quantas will remember your heroic actions."

"Thank you."

Crockta nodded.

The mayor glanced at the Demon's Mouth and got down from his position.

Some gnome researchers insisted that the Demon's Mouth be reclaimed, but it wouldn't leave Crockta no matter what. When people other than Crockta tried to touch it, the steel teeth opened and tried to bite them. Even if Crockta took it off, it would fly back to Crockta after a certain distance.

If it followed Crockta like that, then there was nothing the researchers could say. It was a weird artifact. This issue seemed to be related to the message that said the

power of the belt was limited due to Crockta's lack of power.

Now it was just a steel belt with some energy. Crockta confirmed the information of the belt.

[The Despairing Demon's Belt (Hero), its power is limited. Increases your strength and willpower. Increases your resistance to demonic magic power.]

It was the first time Crockta had ever heard of a Hero rating. It couldn't be sold, but it was probably the highest rated item in Elder Lord. In addition, his achievement points had risen after he received the medal.

[Orc Warrior Crockta's reputation has greatly risen in the area around Quantas.]

[Status Window]

'Person Pursuing the Pinnacle' Crockta, Orc Warrior

Level: 45

Achievement Points: 116510

Assimilation: 80%.

Abilities:

Giant's Destructive Power (Essence)

Troll's Regenerative Power (Essence)

Leyteno's Vigorous Greatsword Technique (Essence)

Combative Spirit (Essence)

Inward Interest (Essence)

Tattoos of Honor and Fighting Spirit (Essence)

Army Crushing Roar (Essence)

All his skills had an Essence rating.

The status window stated that the skills had reached the highest level of proficiency and could no longer be upgraded. From the Pinnacle level onwards, they seemed to require something other than just proficiency.

As he recalled Hoyt showing the ‘Pinnacle’ skill, any upgrade past essence seemed to require some type of enlightenment.

After the award ceremony, the gnomes thanked Crockta again. Crockta shook hands with the gnomes. After the small event, most of them returned to their jobs. Tiyo approached and tapped Crockta’s waist.

“Hey.”

A small gnome acting like a macho soldier was cute. Crockta laughed quietly.

“What, are you laughing?” Tiyo exclaimed.

“It’s nothing.”

“You’re quick to notice *dot*. Delete any irrelevant thoughts.”

Crockta laughed out loud.

There was one more piece of remarkable news. Message windows popped up.

[You have made more achievements than other users in the world of Elder Lord.]

[You have entered the list of rankers.]

[Your current achievement points ranking is 482.]

[Do you want to disclose your information?]

A ranker. His achievement points had again risen as a result of his involvement in the Demon's Mouth incident, causing him to enter the official user rankings. It was an incredibly fast growth, compared to other normal users.

Now Crockta, no, Jung Ian, would be able to receive funding from Elder Saga Corporation in reality. After all, a certain percentage of the revenue that Elder Saga Corporation earned from Elder Lord was allocated to the rankers.

In other words, it was a huge amount of money. It wasn't that much just yet, but it was a wealth that couldn't be compared to running a café.

Crockta shrugged. It wouldn't be a big change from his previous life. However, it seemed good enough for a few luxuries.

He refused to disclose his information.

[Your have refused to reveal your information and your information will be marked as private.]

[Congratulations on becoming a ranker.]

[I look forward to your future adventures!]

While there were some rankers who refused to disclose their information, most rankers were willing to reveal themselves. This way, they could get advertising slots and gain more wealth and honor.

Crockta laughed quietly.

Soon people would find out that a new ranker had appeared and be amazed at the sight of a private ranker climbing up the slots. Crockta's fighting spirit was burning.

Tiyo didn't know what happened to Crockta and just looked up. "Crockta, is there something good?"

"Huhu. It is nothing."

"But why do you keep laughing? Are you still thinking about me?!"

After he offered to accompany Crockta to the north, Tiyo followed him around everywhere. He had already submitted a form to leave the garrison. Crockta accepted Tiyo because there was no reason to refuse his company.

The two of them left the garrison while talking. Crockta didn't ask anything, but Tiyo was eager to explain his situation.

"Huhu! My past suddenly surfaced after I decided to go to the north *dot!*"

"....."

"My father was a great adventurer *dot!* A true adventurer who traveled freely to the north without any fear!"

"Is that so?"

"My artifact, 'General', is also something that my father obtained from the north *dot!* I have built an excellent career as a guard but the blood of an adventurer inside me occasionally bursts out. I realized it when I saw Crockta *dot!*"

Crockta asked after listening to Tiyo's explanation, "The north, how great. Then your father right now...?"

"....."

Tiyo's face darkened. Crockta regretted his question. According to Tiyo's subsequent words, Tiyo's father had gone to the north one day and never returned to Quantas. That was already a few years ago. The rest of Tiyo's family thought that his father was dead, but Tiyo believed in his father's survival.

"I believe that my father is still alive somewhere in the north *dot*."

"I see."

Crockta nodded.

"Then, please look after me, Tiyo."

Crockta held out his hand. Tiyo laughed and reached out his hand. The orc and gnome grabbed hands.

"When will we leave?"

"As quickly as possible."

"Good *dot*. The sooner we start, the better!"

Crockta and Tiyo set a time to meet and separated to go pack. The noisy gnome friend disappeared and the surroundings became calm.

Quantes was grieving.

The situation was resolved but many gnomes, especially those at the academy, were killed by the monsters. The bodies were extremely shattered so the gnomes from the recovery teams had felt nauseous.

A memorial ceremony was held in the square to honor them. The gnomes wore black armbands and mourned the deaths. Crockta's mind became heavy as he watched the scene.

He looked down at the belt around his waist. It was due to this.

But Crockta wondered if it really was an illusion that the demon in this belt showed to him. The emptiness of the universe. The demon tried to cause him despair, not through the orc Crockta, but as the human Jung Ian with his sister and Han Yeori.

That strange feeling was revived again. Was Elder Lord truly just a game? Did it analyze his brain and take the smallest memories to create this realistic illusion? Or was there really something else?

He recalled something Kim Dalkwang in the old [Elder Lord Times] interview.

-I even thought about whether or not Elder Lord is a connection to another world.

When Crockta imagined the landscape of the universe he witnessed, he understood. Crockta had really been frightened at that moment. He couldn't even think that the game would end when he cut off the connection.

He wondered what the truth was. Would he find out if he went to the Temple of the Fallen God? He was walking with these thoughts through his head when someone called out to him, "Orc warrior Crockta?"

He glanced back to see two little gnomes looking up at him. Gnomes were small, but young gnomes were even smaller.

Crockta smiled and nodded. "That's right. What happened?"

The children looked at each other before handing something to Crockta. It was a wrapped cookie. One of the children asked with wide eyes, "Do orcs eat cookies?"

Crockta laughed at their innocent eyes. "Of course."

The children laughed. Looking at their smiling faces, they seemed to be brothers. "This is a gift to the warrior who saved the city."

"It is from our family's bakery.

Crockta looked at the bakery down the street. The gnome who must be the children's father waved to Crockta from the entrance. It seemed like he had given the children the cookies.

"I also want to become an orc warrior like Crockta," One child said.

Crockta patted the little gnome on the head. "Become a gnome warrior, not an orc warrior."

"Can gnomes become a warrior?"

"Of course."

“Then I will be a gnome warrior.”

The child laughed and nodded. The children bowed and ran back towards the bakery. Crockta conveyed his gratitude to the father who was hugging his children and then walked down the road again. He started thinking again.

He didn't know if this was a game or not, but he just had to do his best.

Crockta entered the inn. The innkeeper, who had previously reported Crockta to the guards, flinched as he saw the burly orc. Crockta just grinned as the innkeeper lowered his gaze. Crockta headed up to his room. He was ready to disconnect for a while before heading to the north in earnest.

Then someone knocked on his door.

“.....?”

Crockta opened the door.

“You're here, Crockta.”

It was the beautiful elf, Eileen. It seemed like she came after hearing Crockta's door opening. She smiled at him and said, “You're safe. I'm glad. I heard the news.”

“I'm glad that you're safe.”

“Can I come in?”

“Of course.”

Crockta opened the door. Eileen entered while smelling of a sweet fragrance. It was something more than body odor. Crockta glanced at Eileen. She was somehow dressed up. It seemed like she had sprayed perfume on her.

She stood in front of Crockta and slowly opened her mouth. “Crockta, I was worried. In particular... when I ran away and left Crockta...”

She trailed off. Crockta shook his head.

“Of course it is okay. Deco is well?”

“Deco is also safe. It is thanks to you.” Eileen laughed quietly. “Thanks to Crockta, the great warrior who saved Quantas from the Demon’s Mouth.”

“It is embarrassing to hear.”

“You don’t have to be embarrassed. It is the truth.”

Eileen glanced at the belt Crockta was wearing at his waist. After a slight hesitation, her white hand moved across the belt. Her fingertips rested on the steel teeth of the Demon’s Mouth.

Eileen sighed and said. “This is a horrible belt...”

“Yes.”

Her hands. Crockta’s lips felt dry. Her hands gradually moved. Her delicate hands rose from the belt and touched Crockta’s solar plexus. It was a part where his skin was revealed through his leather armor. Her fingers touched the solid orc skin.

“Eileen.”

Crockta looked down at her.

The elf’s face moved a little closer. Her bright green eyes shone. They were transparent and beautiful eyes. White skin and a straight nose. Her lips were bright red like a blooming flower.

Eileen asked in a whisper. “Are you leaving for the north?”

Crockta nodded. She looked down again then her body slowly came closer.

“I never know what will happen in life.” She raised her head again. Her body revealed her expectations to Crockta. The signs were obvious. Her eyes slightly trembled. “What about you?”

There were numerous implied meanings in her question. Crockta was silent. He didn’t want to embarrass her here. In the narrow room, Eileen looked even more beautiful.

Crockta closed his eyes. At this very moment. Why did ‘her’ face enter his head at this moment?

Crockta shook his head to prevent her face from rising up. Then he gently pushed Eileen away.

“Eileen.”

“.....”

“I have to say this...”

He didn’t want to hurt her with his refusal. As he looked into her questioning eyes, Crockta eventually opened his mouth.

“I actually...”

Then Crockta whispered in her ear, “I...”

Eileen’s eyes widened. “Ah...”

“I’m sorry.”

“I see...” Eileen looked at Crockta with sad eyes. “I understand Crockta.”

“.....”

“I think... maybe. I hope you find what you are looking for in the north.”

‘Let’s meet again one day.’ With those words, Eileen left the room.

Crockta sighed as he looked at the closed door. His mood darkened after she left the room. He could still smell her fragrance.

Silence.

System messages started popping up. They seemed to be mocking Crockta.

[The macho orc, Crockta, has rejected the heart of the beautiful elf!]

[Is your Love Mode lock a reflection of the outside world?]

[By activating Love Mode, you can recover from health conditions!]

[Your status...]

Crockta turned off the system messages and hummed the warrior's song to soothe his heart. He was an orc warrior, not anything else!

"The great warrior... The devotion of a warrior..."

Ddururu...

CHAPTER 64

BECOMING A RANKER (2)

Ian shut down his access to Elder Lord. He left the world of the game but his heart was still full.

Somehow, his eyes were moist.

“No,” Ian muttered, clenching his hands into fists. He was full of power with muscles and a tough lower body. Love Mode might be locked in the game, but his real body was that of a man.

But was it because he was too deeply immersed in the reality of Elder Lord that an unknown anxiety rose inside him? Was he a butterfly, a butterfly? He didn’t know. He wanted to confirm it as soon as possible. Ian went out to the living room and turned on the TV.

The channel was automatically turned to the fashion show from Crystal Secret, an underwear brand. Beautiful women were strutting down the runway in lingerie.

“.....”

Wow! Indeed, he was a man. A real man should worry about the shell casings, not the bullets. Ian took a moment to sigh with relief.

At that moment, the door of his sister’s bedroom opened. Ian jumped. It seemed like she just woke up, because she was stumbling around and rubbing her eyes.

“.....?”

She looked at the television. On the screen, a woman in lingerie could be seen walking towards the end of the runway and winking before elegantly walking back. Then another woman walked out in a dramatic design.

“.....”

Yiyu looked back at Ian. Ian tried to make an excuse, “Ah, no.”

“.....”

Yiyu smiled warmly and said, “I understand, Oppa.”

“No...”

“I’m going to sleep a little more. Ah, sleepy. Sleepy.”

She mumbled soullessly before turning to her room and closing the door. Ian mumbled from his spot, “No...”



Ian met his old teacher after a long time. It wasn’t Lenox or Hoyt, but Jung Ian’s, his real self, teacher.

It was Baek Hanho. They were currently at a franchise café in the area where Baek Hanho lived. The interior was clean and the staff was friendly. Ian looked at Baek Hanho after examining the café around him. Business must’ve been going well since he was wearing expensive things.

Baek Hanho mumbled as he tapped at a big personal tablet, “Huh, this guy, good, stay well.”

He was playing Go on his personal tablet. The advantageous situation gradually tilted as his opponent ate most of his territory and his houses on the board were surrounded.

“You were too greedy.”

“Hah, this, this. Ara.”

Baek Hanho frowned and turned off his tablet. Ian eyed Baek Hanho with a disapproving expression. If he closed the connection like that, it wouldn’t be a win or a loss. The opponent would waste time waiting for Baek Hanho to reconnect.

“That isn’t Go. No, no. Penetration is cowardly.”

“.....”

Who was the cowardly one?

Baek Hanho asked, "What are those eyes?"

"...Is your gym doing well?"

"Fitness seems to be the trend these days. I teach them a few rough exercises. I'm not complacent and combine bodybuilding with scientific technology..."

Baek Hanho ran a gym. He didn't teach the killing techniques that he had shared with Jung Ian, but headed a comprehensive gymnasium that dealt with basic self-defense, CrossFit, and simple combat skills.

"It's been a long time since you've come. Teach those lacking guys."

"I'm too busy."

"Isn't your cafe doing well these days?"

Ian laughed. "I'm busy with other things."

"Hoh. Surely not Elder Lord?"

"Yes."

"Look at this guy. I had to convince you to play Elder Lord..."

"Yes. It would be perfect if you didn't talk..."

Their eyes clashed.

"Huhuhu."

"Huhu."

"You've grown, Ian."

"I was originally taller, Teacher."

"You've grown too cocky after a long time."

“Haven’t you become older?”

“This guy.”

Baek Hanho and Ian grinned at the same time. Then they got up. They left the café and headed towards Baek Hanho’s gym. The ‘Baek Hanho Gym’ used two floors of a building. The personnel greeted Baek Hanho and flinched at his bloody gaze.

The facilities were modern. The interior was wide and free with various weights, sandbags, and even a ring in the middle of the gym.

Ian laughed.

“It’s a ring.”

“Man, I need to play sometimes. Let’s do it over there.”

“Phew. It is a sport.”

The staff members showed interest as Ian and Baek Hanho went over to the ring.

Baek Hanho was middle-aged, but there was still no one who could take him down. It was true for the official athletes who trained here. For them, Baek Hanho was an unknown person that they couldn’t tussle with. Now he brought a strange man and entered the ring. The two people seemed to know each other well.

The other man was slim and didn’t seem special. Rather, he had a warm and gentle face.

“Manager-nim, this...”

One of the staff members brought over gloves and headgear. Baek Hanho shook his head.

“No.”

“Huh?”

Did they mean to use bare hands?

Ian and Baek Hanho took off their shoes but didn't change their clothes. Ian wore a t-shirt and jeans, while Baek Hanho wore an improved hanbok.

They didn't even take off their wrist watches. This was the most natural way for Ian and Baek Hanho. They were devotees of the murderous craft aimed at killing, not suppressing. Their techniques were based on all situations, and it wasn't dependent on clothes, weight or equipment.

Those who didn't know this couldn't understand why the two of them were climbing into the ring.

"Are they planning to fight with bare hands?"

"Is there a quarrel between the two of them?"

"Are they just fighting?"

There was blood-thirst in both of their eyes. It seemed like they were going to watch the most interesting fight in the world. The gym was filled with anticipation for the next battle. However, they were disappointed.

The movements of the two people were static and they didn't hit each other. It was the non-contact method of sparring. The two exchanged gestures without touching each other's body at all.

But their movements were great. Both moved their hands to check each other's movements, and they backed off as soon as there was an attack that would be effective. It was a strange fight where no one could tell who was harmed.

"Why isn't Manager-nim catching him?" One staff member muttered.

Baek Hanho used fearful jujitsu that destroyed the joints by reversing the opponent's strength. However, whenever Baek Hanho tried to grab Ian's clothes, Ian's hand would move nearby and Baek Hanho would quickly withdraw.

The staff members couldn't even imagine it. This was an exchange of extreme practical techniques that would break the opponent's fingers. Their techniques were different from that of mixed martial arts.

Ian and Baek Hanho exchanged several attacks. If this was a real fight, there would

already be a crippling injury.

Ian laughed. His eyes had been clawed out once and his fingers almost broken three times. There were also a few hits to his Adam's apple and solar plexus.

On the other hand, Baek Hanho would've had an ear ripped off and a kick to his ribs. It seemed close but it was ambiguous. If it wasn't for this method, Ian would've already been taken down by Baek Hanho. His joints would've been damaged straight away.

Ian came forward. The two approached, repeated their unusual movements, and they withdrew at the same time. This was Ian's loss.

"Don't play around," Baek Hanho said with a smile.

Ian shook his head. It still wasn't over. At this moment, Ian made a motion like he was throwing something.

"Hat!"

Baek Hanho ducked. But Ian immediately kicked out. His toe stopped in front of Baek Hanho's jaw. The wind pressure caused Baek Hanho's hair to blow.

"...What did you throw?"

Their practice assumed every situation was possible. If Ian had something to throw then he would admit it. It was Baek Hanho's fault for not grasping it in advance. But there was nothing to be thrown. There was a wristwatch but if Ian wanted to throw it, he would have to make the motion of throwing it.

Ian grinned. "My heart of respect towards Teacher."

"....."

It was just a bluff. As the tendon popped out on Baek Hanho's forehead, he immediately grabbed Ian's foot.

"Oh, I surrender!"

"This guy has learned something bad!"

“Wait a minute! My ligament! Tap! Tap tap!”

Techniques involving the lower body joints were considered the most dangerous. It was very common for the legs to break even in practice. Ian frantically knocked against Baek Hanho’s body.

“This brat.”

Baek Hanho released Ian and hit his head lightly. Thus, the sparring between the two of them was over. It was concluded that Baek Hanho had the advantage.

“You still have a long way to go.”

“Kuoong.”

“You haven’t even stepped on my shadow yet.”

As the two of them left the ring, one of the staff members asked Baek Hanho, “Manager, what was that just now?”

Baek Hanho and Ian looked at each other and shrugged. “There is such a thing. Don’t worry since it’s like playing between us.”

“Who is that next to you? Do you know him?”

“He is my disciple.”

“Disciple?”

They were confused. So far, Baek Hanho had never mentioned a disciple. They might have believed it was a joke but Baek Hanho wasn’t that type of manager.

“He used to be cute in the old days, but now he is too cocky for his own good.”

Ian bit back his words.

Then one of the staff members formed a fist. His fighting spirit was rising. He had studied martial arts in the past and now it was a hobby. He had received many offers due to his large body.

The person who he earnestly admired was Baek Hanho. He learned through common sense not to go against Baek Hanho. The age, weight, and techniques were the opposite of everything he had ever known. No one would believe that the staff member couldn't lay a hand on the middle-aged Baek Hanho.

If so, what about his disciple?

"Manager-nim."

"What?"

"If your disciple is okay with it, can I have a spar with him? I want to test my skills."

Baek Hanho looked at Ian again. "Yes." Then he laughed and asked Ian, "How about it?"

"Teacher?"

"Rules are rules, so use regular blows."

"No... Wait..."

Ian panicked.

The large staff member greeted him. "Please!" Then the staff member put on the equipment and climbed into the ring.

"....."

Ian shook his head as he looked at his opponent's size.

It wasn't easy to overcome the difference in weight when it came to a sporting event, especially when it involved striking each other. In addition, the opponent wasn't an ordinary person, but a man who had learned to strike properly.

"Just looking at him, he is part of the heavyweight division..."

Ian took a step back. A staff member helped him wear the headgear and the gloves. After finishing the preparations, he climbed into the ring. Ian bounced against the rope and looked down at his gloved hands. He wasn't familiar with this type of equipment. If he made a misstep then there might be an injury today.

The staff member spoke from the other side.

“I will be gentle since I know the difference in weight. Don’t worry.”

“.....”

Ian bit his lip. Ian didn’t look like it on the outside, but he had a great deal of pride and competitiveness. Now the opponent was saying that he would be gentle.

Gentle. It wasn’t towards anyone else but himself.

“Thank you,” said Ian, his voice sinking.

Baek Hanho saw this happen and said to the staff member by his side, “Hey, Cheolwon.”

“Yes, Manager-nim.”

“Bring a towel soaked in cold water.”

“Huh? Yes...”

The man was confused. A wet towel? But Baek Hanho didn’t say anything else. After the staff member brought the wet towel, he could see why.

“Cough!”

Their manager’s disciple with the slim body was beating the opponent who seemed to be in the heavyweight division. It was too fast. The disciple avoided his opponent’s fist and punched back with a technique that wasn’t possible to understand through talking.

The opponent resisted, but the man pushed the bigger opponent into the corner and punched his face and belly. The actions were clean and clear. He struck whenever there was a gap.

“Kup!”

At that moment, the opponent crouched and tried an upper punch, but Ian immediately backed away but punching the opponent’s chin with both gloves. The opponent fainted. It was a mere one round.

“.....”

Baek Hanho nodded. The staff member carrying the towel realized the meaning of Baek Hanho's gesture and climbed into the ring. He woke up the unconscious man and wiped his swollen face with a towel.

“Hrmm...”

Baek Hanho looked at Ian taking off his equipment. It wasn't just during this spar.

“Too fast...”

Baek Hanho had felt it during the non-contact method.

Ian had become faster.

At the end, when Ian threw something and immediately kicked, Baek Hanho had been expecting Ian's kick. So he was going to grab the leg and use a joints attack. But it was too fast to react to. His heart had rattled as he saw Ian's toe in front of him. It had been a while since he felt like that.

It was the same for this spar as well.

No matter how fast Ian was, the difference in weight was clear. Therefore, he had expected Ian to struggle. But Ian's vision and speed were more than expected. No matter how big the person was, if he couldn't catch up with the opponent then it was like a battle between an adult and a child.

“This guy...?”

Baek Hanho shrugged.

CHAPTER 65

BECOMING A RANKER (3)

-This is [Elder Lord Weekly], where we bring you the weekly news on Elder Lord!

Yiyu yawned.

She wasn't playing Elder Lord anymore, but her friends were different. Everyone's gaze went back to the screen at once.

"I'm just going to grab a drink."

Yiyu picked up her glass of beer but nobody responded. Yiyu pouted.

They had come to this place to celebrate the end of the semester. Yiyu and her friends Park Jungtae, Yoon Bora, Kim Ari, and Ban Taehoon were gathered at the pub. All of them had recently finished their final exams and were currently on vacation.

"Look," Yoon Bora said, pointing at the screen.

-The first news this week is on the rehabilitation service emerging in Maillard, also known as the 'Rehabilitation Brotherhood'.

"Wow."

"They really are famous these days."

Yiyu poured her beer sullenly and drank alone. Then some faces appeared on the screen. It was the three people who made Yiyu quit Elder Lord. They were the three people who PKed Yiyu. She didn't care if they were rehabilitated now.

Yiyu poured beer into her empty glass again, but Park Jungtae gave an excuse to drink it instead.

-These people specialize in rehabilitating users.

The screen showed a recorded video. Users attacking a novice user were immediately

suppressed, bound, and were dragged somewhere.

The screen changed again and they seemed to be directing the users to do something.

-Use means other than violence.

On the screen, the vicious users started to do volunteer work. They helped out physically challenged NPCs, NPCs who were having a tough time, troubled users, and anyone who needed help. Once again, the screen changed and showed people constructing houses for Maillard's poor. The sweat of the users working on the construction site could be seen on the screen.

The reporter interviewed the three men who were the backbone of the Rehabilitation Brotherhood. They were currently in the middle of construction, so they were all sweaty.

-Why did you start doing this?

The man in the middle spoke,

-In fact, we were originally malicious users. We were very bad guys.

-Ahh... then what happened?

-We changed after meeting a single orc.

-Orc?

-Yes. We met him and decided to think of Elder Lord as another world, instead of just a game. The orc might've been an NPC, but he was a teacher who treated us genuinely and changed our minds, more than anyone we met in the real world. The detailed story can be found on the Rehabilitation Brotherhood's homepage.

The URL of the Rehabilitation Brotherhood website flashed on the screen as subtitles.

The reporter and the Rehabilitation Brotherhood continued the conversation on their activities and how they kept in touch with the users after the rehabilitation. The Rehabilitation Brotherhood said that they planned to gradually increase the number of branches and that those who have been rehabilitated were already active in other cities.

-We would like to take this opportunity to ask forgiveness for the evils that we have done in the past.

-We sincerely apologize to everyone we hurt.

-I'm sorry.

The three men bowed towards the screen. The reporter tried to make them stop, but they didn't move their heads for a while.

Yiyu shrugged her shoulders.

The reporter conducting the interview changed the topic.

-It is really incredible. It isn't easy to reflect on the past and be born again. Who is the orc who rehabilitated you? What is his name?

They looked at each other. The one person grinned and replied,

-I'm sure it's a name that everyone has heard these days. He is the orc named Crockta.

-Ah... that orc!

Yiyu's friend, Ban Taehoon, looked at the screen and asked, "It is that Crockta? From Arnin?"

"The orc at Chesswood?"

"That orc, right? The orc of justice? Is he really an event NPC?"

"There is such a thing in Elder Lord. It is a game with realism, so there will be those who interfere."

Yoon Bora chewed on a snack and said, "I joined the Crockta fan club yesterday."

"What, Bora is worshipping an NPC now?"

"He's so cool. There's nobody like that these days. Although he is an orc, I can't help but praise him. Do you know what the fan club name is?"

“What is it?”

“He’s an Orc, yet still Praiseworthy!”

“That is really childish. Did someone with no naming sense decide that name?”

“Do you want to go back?”

Yoon Bora hit Ban Taehoon’s head. A great blow! It deserved praise.

[Elder Lord Weekly] finished the interview with the Rehabilitation Brotherhood’s last words.

-Then, I will finish this interview with the Rehabilitation Brotherhood’s slogan.

After the reporter spoke, the three men pointed to the screen and smiled.

-Whatever bad thing you’ve done!

-You are actually not a bad person!

-We know!

Dudong! Some sound effects played before the screen returned to the studio.

Now [Elder Lord Weekly] started to analyze the topic of Crockta. His name started to be known in the community due to the Arnin rescue activities.

He reported the wrongdoings of Arnin’s mayor, saved Chesswood from the big clans, and recently did something great in Quantas. In the community, Crockta was treated as a hero who implemented justice everywhere he went.

The man and woman who were the hosts started talking.

-Crockta is the hottest person at the moment. His nickname is the Orc of Justice! What do you think?

-It is amazing. He is different from the users. For NPCs, Elder Lord is a reality, so they hold onto their beliefs more desperately. That is why it is so great. They bet with their lives on the line.

-What about the rumors that say Crockta is a user? He is wearing a headband around his forehead.

-Hahaha, then he would come out. As Crockta's achievements became known, many rumors have started circulating. However, I don't think they are realistic. Orc warriors often have tattoos as decorations. Either way, there is an increasing number of orc users, thanks to Crockta.

A map of Elder Lord flashed on the screen. There was a line linking Arnin, Chesswood, Maillard, and Quantas. This was Crockta's breadcrumb trail. It was obvious that he was heading towards the north.

-It seems like he is going to the north, so he can't be a user, can he?

-Indeed. The North... maybe we will never see Crockta again.

They shook their heads like they were sad.

There were no user starting points in the north, so they had to go beyond the Forest of Creatures in order to get there. However, no user had ever come out of that place alive.

The game publishers stated that the north clearly existed in the world of Elder Lord, but it was currently left alone by users. The northern part of the continent was treated as unknown content that the users could enjoy in the future once their levels rose and their characters developed.

-Looking back, I really think that he is an event NPC made by Elder Saga Corporation. I hope that Crockta comes back safely from the north.

-That's right. I want to see the great Orc of Justice again.

The hosts shrugged and changed topics.

-Then, what is next?

-The rankers have changed. A new user has appeared like a comet between long established rankers. Furthermore, this person is a rare type of ranker who has kept their information private. They've hopped up to rank 482.

-The non-disclosure stimulates my curiosity.

-Haha, I wanted to interview the person, but I don't know who they are. Instead, we will have an interview with the former number 500 ranker, the dwarf user Camas, who fell off the rankings, due to the appearance of a new ranker.

-Camas-ssi must be really disappointed.

-I am burning with the will to become a ranker again.

"Rankers are good. Don't they make a ton of money?"

"The profits are more than I can imagine."

Yiyu's friends lost interest in [Elder Lord Weekly] and started focusing on drinking. As university students, they were becoming increasingly worried about finding employment.

"Yiyu is good."

"What is it?"

"You can just work in your brother's café if you want."

"That's right. Is the name Café Reason? Why did he name it Reason, instead of Yiyu?" (Yiyu is also the word used for 'Reason' in Korean).

"He is a brother who takes care of his little sister."

Yiyu shrugged. There wasn't much time left until her graduation. Ban Taehoon asked, "Should I become a full-time Elder Lord player?"

"Cut it out."

"Oh, I hate working. A while ago, Taesung hyung returned from an embarrassing interview. Kukuku, it was funny when I heard about it. He actually fought with the interviewer."

"Truly Park Taesung."

They kept drinking as they talked.

The first one to tap out was Yiyu. Yiyu was a weak drinker, so her face was red and her head gradually sunk towards the table, despite only drinking beer. Yoon Bora poked Yiyu's cheek but she didn't move. Bora shook her head.

"What do we do about her?"

"Ah, truly Jung Yiyu. She can't drink alcohol."

"We should've started giving her Coke when we were talking earlier."

The rest of them were fine. Park Jungtae opened his phone. "I have a way."

"What is it?"

"I have Yiyu's brother's number."

"You can just call him whenever you want?"

"He asked me to contact him if anything like this happened."

Park Jungtae sent a message to Ian, who replied straight away.

"He is coming."

"Wow."

"Have you ever seen Yiyu's brother?"

"I was the first one to see him."

"He is completely handsome."

"As much as me?" Ban Taehoon asked.

"Shut up."

Of those gathered, Ban Taehoon was the only one who hadn't met Ian. The rest had already encountered him before. They left Yiyu alone and talked about their vacation

plans. They all had individual goals, such as part-time work, volunteer work, studying, etc...

Then a familiar voice interrupted them, "Hello."

It was Jung Yunji. Kim Ari was close to her, so she welcomed Yunji warmly.

"Ah! Yunji. Wow, how did you come here? Amazing. Did you come with other people?"

"We came to celebrate our exams. You as well?"

"Yes."

Jung Yunji had also come here with close friends to celebrate the end of the semester. Jung Yunji discovered Yiyu lying on the table and laughed. "Yiyu is out."

"Yes, that's why we called her brother."

"Ah..."

Jung Yunji looked at the front door of the bar. At that moment, she recalled Yiyu's brother. Their eyes had met for a moment. Was it a coincidence? She didn't know his name yet, but she wanted to know more.

"Are you doing well in Elder Lord?" Yunji was asked.

"Yes. I have a promising career in the Blacksmith Company."

"You are truly amazing."

The table was split up into separate small conversations. The bar was loud enough that each conversation was buried in the hubbub of the area.

Yoon Bora looked at the sleeping Yiyu and said, "When she is like this, I don't think Yiyu resembles her brother."

"Why?"

"Yiyu is nice, but she is indifferent until she gets close to someone."

“Yes, she was like that to me at first. It was completely impersonal.”

“She has a nasty temper and won’t hesitate to hit someone, but her brother is so gentle.”

“Really? I’m curious,” Ban Taehoon said.

“Ban Taehoon, you can’t even compare to him, so don’t feel expectant.”

“What? Damn.”

Suddenly, Park Jungtae raised his hand. He was looking at someone. A man was at the entrance. It was Ian. Ian smiled as he found Park Jungtae and approached. The dim bar lighting lit up Ian’s face.

“Hello!”

“Hello.”

“Hello.”

Yiyu’s friends greeted him in unison. Ian lightly bowed before sighing as he looked down at Yiyu on the table. He nudged Yiyu to wake her up. She just grumbled and buried her face even more deeply into her arms.

“Everybody is having fun. I’m sorry about Yiyu.”

“No. We are to blame for Yiyu getting so drunk, Hyung-nim. I’m sorry.” These were the first words that Ban Taehoon spoke to Ian. Ian laughed.

“It’s nothing. I will be taking Yiyu now. Have fun, you guys.”

Ian lifted Yiyu up, who blinked and flinched as she discovered Ian. She laughed awkwardly at Ian’s expression and leaned against her brother as they left the bar together.

“I have a bad relationship with my brother. I wish I had an older brother like that. I’m envious.”

“If I had a little sister like you...”

“Shut up.”

“You always tell me to shut up. Are you my father in law?”

“What a brat.”

Suddenly, a large set of skewers were placed before them. The group’s eyes widened.

“We didn’t order this...”

The part time worker replied, “That man went and paid for everything. This was added on top of that.”

“Wow.”

“Wow.”

Their expressions changed as they looked down at the glistening meat skewers shining from the orange lights of the bar. It was definitely oversized. It was the most expensive dish in this place. It was a dish that they found hard to afford on a student’s living expense.

“Whoa...”

“That Hyung-nim is great...”

Jung Yunji watched Ian quietly come and go and asked, “Did Yiyu’s brother come for her?”

“Uh, Yunji. Yes. You know him?”

“Do you perhaps know what her brother’s name is?”

“Oh~ Yunji is interested.” Yoon Bora laughed.

Park Jungtae replied as he grabbed a skewer, “Jung Ian.”

“Jung Ian?”

“Yes.”

Jung Ian. It suited him somehow.

Somehow the name was familiar. Jung Yunji was confused. Where had she heard that name before? Jung Yunji thanked Park Jungtae and thought as she returned to her seat. Where did she hear it?

The voices of the hosts were still flowing from the TV.

-I hope that the new ranker will disclose their information one day. I'm curious as to what type of adventurer they are in Elder Lord.

-That's right.



"Come on, Crockta!"

Tiyo shouted as he carried a large backpack. It was now the start of their journey to the north. Crockta was also carrying a big backpack for the journey. The garrison members saluted Crockta and Tiyo who were leaving the gates.

"Please protect Quantas when I'm not here *dot!*"

"Yes! Captain Tiyo!"

"Thank you!"

"Come back safely!"

"Everyone saluteeeeeee!"

Tiyo seemed to be respected by his men.

Crockta swallowed the clean air of Elder Lord. It was back to adventuring. The energy of the new beginning filled his body. Their goal was the north, a fearful and unknown land that no one had invaded.

"Go Tiyo!"

"Go Crockta!"

The orc and gnome started to walk towards the north. At that moment...

[Stella: Excuse me... Ian?]

Ian flinched and missed a step.

[Stella: Perhaps...]

“What is it, Crockta? Are you already tired?”

Tiyo hit Crockta’s waist. Crockta waited for Stella’s next message.

CHAPTER 66

SEASON OF HUNTING (1)

[Stella: Perhaps... where do you live in real life?]

Crockta was relieved at her question. He lied.

[Ian: I live in Busan, Busan. Hahaha! Ay, come visit Busan! We have donuts and gukbap! Gukbap! Kelkelkelkel!]

(TL: Ian fakes a Busan accent during this.)

[Stella: Ah... I see. I thought I would ask since I know someone with the same name. How are you doing?]

The messages to Stella would display the name of the caller. As he acted like a man who lived in Busan, Crockta hurriedly ended the conversation. Jung Yunji was becoming dangerous. He wanted to hide his identity as much as possible.

“Why are you so dazed? Let’s go Crockta *dot*! The North! The unknown!” Tiyo cried out as he bounced around.

Crockta laughed. He was a cute friend.

“I, Tiyo, am going! Kiyoooooh!”

Tiyo started running ahead into a vast plain. If they looked beyond that horizon, they could see the forbidden area they were going towards. A roar emerged from Crockta’s chest, “I, Crockta, am goingggggg! Bul’tarrrr!”

Crockta rushed forward as well. An orc and a gnome started running towards the north.



Hunting was a calm, peaceful task.

He moved within the darkness of the forest. He was the shadow, an entity the enemy couldn't notice, moving between the trees, aiming to cut off the enemy's breath.

The game that he was staring at was rare. A twin head ogre. A mutation like this didn't just appear. If a legitimate evil spirit polluted an ogre, then it became this ugly monster.

Therefore, what he needed to penetrate wasn't the mutant twin head ogre, but the core of darkness infecting it. He had aimed for the darkness a long time ago. It was his old cherished wish, but he had missed the chance.

As winter passed and the buds of spring spread across the land, the smell of that darkness started to flare up again. The decaying mutant ogre proved this phenomenon.

His mouth distorted. He had been waiting, and he wouldn't miss it this time.

Now. It came again.

Hunting season.



"....."

Crockta touched the gnome's shoulder.

"Tiyo?"

"Going, I'm going, really."

Tiyo looked at the black forest and gulped. There was a thick spread of black trees that was so dense that they could only barely see inside. It felt like they were faintly moving when seen with the naked eye.

Suddenly, system messages popped up.

[You have arrived at the Forest of Creatures.]

[Wow! You have great courage to come here.]

[If you pass through the Forest of Creatures, there will be a reward for arriving first.]

[How do you like this quest after not receiving one for a long time?]

[Special achievement points will be awarded as you pass through the Forest of Creatures. If you can achieve a hidden clear condition, you will earn tremendous rewards and a title.]

[Good luck!]

Crockta confirmed the message windows. Before, he thought they were just set messages, but these days, it was obvious that an artificial intelligence was controlling the messages. The words were somewhat hateful.

Tiyo asked, “C-Crockta, are we really going? We are going right?”

Crockta burst out laughing. “Tiyo, are you going to continue like this? Are you really from the Quantas Gnome Garrison?”

“What! I’m not an indecisive person!” Tiyo jumped. “Good *dot*! I’ll show you! Starting from now *dot*!”

Then he leaped eagerly towards the forest. The small gnome couldn’t be seen after he entered the shadows of the dark forest. Crockta was about to walk after him when...

“Uwaaaaaaaaaah!”

Tiyo came running back out of the forest and rolling across the ground before getting back up and running again.

“What’s going on?” Crockta drew his greatsword and shouted. There was a large shadow in the place where Tiyo had run out. It was about to come out of the forest.

Crockta was nervous.

“.....”

The identity of that shadow... was a huge spotted cow.

“...M-Monster! A monster has appeared *dot!*” Tiyo shouted as he grabbed Crockta’s pants.

Crockta gazed at Tiyo with cold eyes. Tiyo felt a chill as he gazed into Crockta’s eyes and looked away.

“...Moo...”

The cow cried out.

“.....”

It was just a cow.

Tiyo got up from his seat without speaking and rubbed at his clothes, “Hum hum, hum! Now, shall we go Crockta? Don’t hesitate *dot!*”

Then he started walking again. Crockta shook his head and followed behind Tiyo. Tiyo snooped around the cow.

“By the way, why is there a cow here?”

“I was thinking that too.”

Crockta examined the cow. It wasn’t just a wild cow. There was evidence that someone was looking after it. It stood still as they approached it and stared at them with simple eyes. Crockta stroked the head of the cow and it cried out again. It was a calm cry.

Moooooo...

It calmed the hearts of the listeners. This place now felt like a leisurely pasture, not a forest full of creatures.

“Is someone inside?”

“Are there people in this forest?”

The Forest of Creatures had long been regarded as a forbidden area that couldn't be accessed by people. Usually, people would fall prey to creatures as soon as they entered. But now there were traces of a human's touch on the cow. What was this?

Tiyo and Crockta stared at each other.

“Go.”

Now it really was the time to enter the Forest of Creatures. Tiyo climbed onto the cow.

“Crockta, lead us well.”

“.....”

The cow's tail waved. Crockta led the cow and Tiyo and entered the Forest of Creatures.

It was cold as soon as they entered.

The temperature was lowered as the dense foliage covered the sky and blocked the sun, causing everything below it to be in steady shade. The damp ground was trampled underfoot as moss flourished at the base of the trees and unknown sticky things got caught on their feet.

It felt like a bad place.

“Cow, where is your house?”

Tiyo whispered to the cow. Then the cow started to walk in a certain direction. Tiyo and Crockta followed the cow as they gradually headed deeper into the forest.

They had no way of knowing what would appear beyond the darkness. Just like mountains were often described as strange, he felt a creepy sensation as the direction seemed to keep shifting. It was a strange feeling that he had never experienced before.

Suddenly, they sensed something moving. Crockta and Tiyo flinched. Crockta placed his hand on the handle of his greatsword while Tiyo prepared General.

The moving object approached. A troll. It was a forest where trolls were common. Crockta grinned. This truly was the Forest of Creatures. Monsters like goblins or werewolves wouldn't be able to stay here.

The minimum requirement was a troll! Weak creatures wouldn't survive here.

Tiyo shouted, "Go! Crockta!"

"Bul'tar!"

As Crockta rushed out, Tiyo fired 'General'.

It was a formation similar to how they defeated the ogres at Quantas. Tiyo would block the enemy in the back with his magic weapon while Crockta faced it directly. The troll was hit by General's intense light and fell to the ground like it was paralyzed.

"Kiek!"

Tiyo's General didn't have the destructive power to kill the enemy, but it was excellent support. The troll groaned at Tiyo's bombardment. Crockta plunged in. The famous 'Ogre Slayer' cut the troll's neck.

The troll's head and body were separated. But it was a troll. Even after the head and body were separated, both sides wriggled and moved. Bubbles bloomed at the cut surface, indicating the troll's unique regeneration. If the troll's head and body joined back together, it could move again.

"How great."

"Creepy *dot*."

Crockta's recovery skill had reached 'Troll's Regenerative Power (Essence)', but it seemed lacking compared to a real troll. Crockta and Tiyo exchanged glances. It was a truly great collaboration. This Forest of Creatures might not be that tough.

Crockta held out his hand and the gnome hit his palm in a high five.

"Moooooooo..."

The cow gave a long cry in delight. Tiyo once again got on the cow's back with General.

“Cow, where do you live?”

The cow’s tail waved and it started moving again. It was heading deeper into the forest. Crockta followed it.

The cow seemed to be familiar with the Forest of Creatures and they passed by a variety of strange things. If the cow suddenly sniffed the ground, delicious mushrooms would emerge. Once it began to cry towards the sky, there were sweet fruits.

Crockta and Tiyo bit a red fruit. The cow also nibbled at the fragrant mushroom.

“It seems very familiar with this place dot.”

“It really seems to live here.”

As they continued walking with the cow, the shape of a house started to appear. Crockta lowered his body. The cow was tame but there was no law saying that the owner of the house would be. Besides, the person was strong enough to live in the Forest of Creatures.

The house was surrounded by a moat and a sharp fence. Their bodies would be pierced by a sharp barricade if they approached without thinking.

Tiyo said.

“A magic circle *dot*.”

“Magic circle?”

“Looking at the design, they don’t seem to be lacking in intelligence. It looks like this place is protected with magical artifacts. Indeed, this is how they managed to live in the Forest of Creatures.”

Tiyo analyzed. As a gnome, he easily recognized the magical engineering design. As he listened to Tiyo’s words, a faint presence could be felt in the area.

“Moo...”

The cow moved around the moat and suddenly stopped at one point. It walked through a shallow part of the moat. After crossing the moat, the cow crouched and

passed through a hole in the dirt beneath the fence. It was a small passage. Despite the cow's big mass, it went through like a mollusk.

Then it cried out again from beyond the fence.

"Moooooo..."

Crockta and Tiyo looked at each other.

"Can we go in?"

"I am curious."

"But it is another person's house."

"We can't ignore the cow. The cow is also a member of that household! In other words, the member of the family invited us *dot!*"

"Um..."

He had a point.

Crockta and Tiyo used the shallow part of the moat and passed through the hole like the cow. Tiyo entered easily but Crockta's skin was scratched by a piece of fence and he barely passed through it.

The inside was an entirely different world.

"Ah!"

"Umm."

It was a peaceful scenery that couldn't be imagined inside the Forest of Creatures. First of all, there were two more cows. The cow that Tiyo and Crockta brought here cried out leisurely. On one side, chickens were pecking at the ground. Vegetables were growing in the garden. In the center, a solid house made of logs was standing firm. There were axes, pickaxes, and farming equipment lying around. It felt like someone had lived here for a long time.

"How great."

Suddenly, Crockta found something among the tools. They were handmade arrows and arrowheads. Since this was a forest... a hunter.

“Look! Crockta! This is definitely the artifact that is protecting this place dot!” Tiyo shouted.

Crockta approached and saw a magic staff next to the log cabin. There was a crystal ball at the end and a blue aura flowed from it and spread out in a circle. It seemed to create a dim shield that concealed this area.

“The magic power runs down here and...”

Tiyo explained. Below the place where the staff was inserted, there were round shapes and patterns.

“This is a great technology *dot*.”

Tiyo’s eyes shone. As Tiyo was looking around, he accidentally nudged the staff. At that moment.

Piiing!

Piyok!

There was a sound and the magic staff lost its light.

“Eh...?”

Tiyo stiffened. The blue energy flowing from the staff suddenly disappeared. Then faint film covering this area also disappeared.

“...Ah, no.”

The shield protecting this place had disappeared. Tiyo retreated.

Crockta looked up at the sky. Wyverns were passing above them.

“.....!”

The moment that the barrier disappeared, a wyvern glanced down. Crockta’s hands

became sweaty. Just keep flying.

However, the wyverns started circling around.

Tiyo stuttered, "I, I, I, just..."

"Calm down Tiyo."

One of the biggest rules of the battlefield: don't dwell on the past. It already happened, so it was meaningless to argue. They could analyze the operation or fighting techniques after it was over, but they should concentrate on the enemy when it was in front of them.

The wyverns started to flap their wings. It was the precursor to gliding.

Crockta looked around. There were two objects of prey that the wyverns could aim for. Them or the cows.

"Tiyo, there are two choices."

"...What does that mean?"

More wyverns started appearing. The group of wyverns had flocked at the sudden appearance of easy food. Tiyo raised General.

"We only have one choice *dot!*"

"Kulkul, well said."

One Wyvern started to dive towards the cows, followed by three other wyverns. Tiyo aimed the muzzle of 'General'.

Crockta grinned. His new ally wasn't just cute.

"As a reliable guard, I never run away from a fight *dot!*"

He was a real man.

The moment that the Wyvern's sharp claws were about to grab a cow, Crockta's roar resounded through the forest.

“Bul’tarrrrrrrrr————!”

It was the Essence ranked skill, Army Crushing Roar! It went beyond a mere battle cry and actually affected the enemies with physical force.

The dense vegetation shook. The wyverns were shocked and stopped their descent. The cows figured out the situation and turned to flee from the wyverns. The wyverns regained their spirits and tried to catch the cows again, but Crockta blocked them.

The greatsword tore at the wyverns’ wings. One wyvern fell to the ground while the ones following scattered to the left and right. Tiyo attacked the wyverns with General.

“Ahhhhhhh!”

The wyverns spread out and soared up to the sky again. The wyverns were fast and avoided the attack. Tiyo’s bullets just hit the air.

The confrontation continued with no progress. Crockta’s expression hardened. They couldn’t overpower the wyverns who dominated the sky. But more wyverns would come flocking soon.

“Ugh...”

Tiyo bit his lip. At that moment...

Susususuk.

A strange bolt flew through the air.

Pasasak.

One wyvern crashed.

“.....!”

“What?”

Crockta and Tiyo’s eyes shone.

Susususuk.

Once again, a bolt of light passed through the sky and another wyvern fell. The wyverns continued to plummet. Now there were no more wyverns threatening them as they all became corpses. The party couldn't tell where the attack came from.

Crockta looked at the arrows lodged in the bodies of the wyverns.

“.....!”

Crockta approached to verify it.

Sususuk, an arrow flew right in front of Crockta's nose.

“.....!”

Then another arrow struck in front of Crockta's foot, an obvious warning not to move from this spot. Crockta and Tiyo looked in the direction that the arrows came from.

Someone was walking towards them.

CHAPTER 67

SEASON OF HUNTING (2)

It was a large man carrying a machete at his waist. Bright eyes shone through matted hair.

Crockta spoke, "I am alive. We are..."

But before Crockta could finish speaking, the man aimed his machete at Crockta and said, "Get lost, you thieves."

"We aren't thieves..."

Crockta tried to explain but the machete moved even closer. The blade touched his skin. Crockta's eyebrows twitched. But it was a fact that they had invaded the man's home. He decided to step back.

"I understand. We'll leave."

The machete moved back. Tiyo, watching from the side, jumped in. "Ah! We...!"

"Shut up. Kid."

The shocked Tiyo looked at the man and said, "What did you say? K-Kid?"

Crockta seized Tiyo before he could aim 'General'. The man approached the magic staff that was protecting the area. He touched something and the blue energy emerged again. It spread all over the place, creating a dim shield around the fence.

"I just wanted to say that we didn't mean to do anything. Stay alive."

Crockta said politely as he stood before the hole. The man glanced at Crockta and didn't respond. Crockta shrugged and crawled out through the small hole. The man gazed after the receding Crockta and muttered, "Annoying people..."

Then he approached the cow that was staring at him. It was the cow that Crockta and Tiyo saved.

“You look well Skolla. Were there any problems?”

It was a soft voice, unlike the previous wild person who seemed like he would swing the machete at any moment. The man rubbed his cheek against the cow’s face. The cow gave a long cry.

“What?”

The man responded like he could understand the cow’s words. The cow cried out again, “Mooooooooo...”

The man’s eyes deepened as he looked back. He stared at the hole that Crockta and Tiyo went through. The man spoke.

“That doesn’t mean that you owe them. They came in on their own so they can take care of the problems themselves.” The man gazed into the air before sighing. “I understand, I understand. Don’t worry.”

He approached the other cows and repeated the same greeting. Then he gathered the cows together and feed. After that, he looked at the forest that unfolded beyond the fence. This place was always damp and cloudy. A forest of darkness. Ordinary people who entered would get lost and become the prey of the creatures.

The cows drinking from the water trough gave long cries.“Mooooooooo...”

The man filled his quiver with arrows. “I understand.”



“He is a very bad person. Isn’t that right Crockta?”

Crockta responded to Tiyo, “It is true though. That we were uninvited guests.”

“But we protected his cows.”

“We also called the wyverns.”

“Hmm hmm! Yes, but he called me a kid *dot!*” Tiyo jumped up and touched Crockta’s shoulder. “I am tall for a gnome *dot!* I’m not a puny kid! I’m only small compared to Crockta *dot!*”

“Kulkulkul.”

“Don’t laugh *dot!*” Tiyo whined.

They relied on the compass to head north. If they continued through the Forest of Creatures then the north would appear.

“Surprisingly, there aren’t many creatures.”

They thought that they would be attacked endlessly the moment they entered the forest, but it was more calm than they thought. In particular, there seemed to be no signs of creatures in this area. The sounds of birds and insects were gone as well. There weren’t even any wyverns occasionally roaming the sky.

Crockta touched the handle of his greatsword.

“Tiyo.”

“Huh?”

“Shh.” Crockta raised a finger to his mouth. “Go quietly.”

“What did you see...?”

“I didn’t see anything, but the area is too quiet. The Forest of Creatures is infamous for its dangerous creatures. There is only one reason for the silence here.”

“.....”

Tiyo understood what he meant and nodded. The absence of nearby living beings meant there was a nearby predator that they couldn’t tolerate. Maybe Crockta and Tiyo had stepped foot into a dangerous place.

“Let’s go quickly.”

“Understood *dot.*”

They killed the sound of their footsteps and started to move. Vines dangled from tree branches and covered their view. Crockta pulled out his greatsword and sliced through them. The obstacles weren’t a match for Ogre Slayer and were cut off cleanly.

“Why would that guy live here?” Tiyo muttered.

“I don’t know.”

Crockta was also curious about the man’s story. It was a talent to have pierced a wyvern in an instant. What was the reason for living in this place? The man was apparently a hunter.

“It is in order to hunt.”

Hunters lived by hunting. They proved themselves by killing stronger game. There must be a reason for the hunter to set up camp here. What type of opponent was the hunter trying to catch here?

“.....”

At that moment, Crockta flinched. A huge shadow had just passed above him.

“What?”

Tiyo raised his head. The branches, leaves, and vines covered the sky, so he couldn’t see it properly. It was just a big black shadow.

“Wyverns?”

The moment they were about to resume walking...

The shadow passed over their heads again.

“.....!”

Crockta grasped his greatsword while looking up at the sky. The big body quickly passed through their field of vision. It was obviously bigger than a wyvern.

“Tiyo!”

“I-I saw it.”

Tiyo was already grabbing ‘General’. He aimed the muzzle towards the sky, but the shadow didn’t appear again. Tiyo looked around.

“What?”

Crockta and Tiyo moved slowly as they watched the sky. At that moment, a beast’s growl resounded out from behind them, “Grrrrrrr...”

Crockta hurriedly raised his greatsword. Beyond the vegetation and vines, the form of the giant beast was being revealed.

“That... what...?” Tiyo murmured in a trembling voice.

The enormous face of an old man was staring at them, but its revealed teeth were that of a beast. Beyond the disheveled hair that was like a shaggy mane, two wings spread open, making its size even bigger.

It was a monster with the face of an old man, the body of a lion, and the wings of a bat. It was called a Manticore, a strong monster that appeared at the end of a dungeon.

It approached Tiyo and Crockta. Crockta immediately retreated from its giant presence. The wrinkled face distorted.

“Grrrrr...”

It was a horrible appearance. It resembled an old man but the strangely heterogeneous nature aroused disgust in him. The gangrene-infested face pushed forward and it opened its mouth wide, baring sharp teeth.

“Kraaaaah!”

The Manticore rushed forward. At that moment, Crockta almost unconsciously looked away. It was such a horrible existence. The momentum of the charge made him feel like he was facing a tank alone.

At that time, a light emerged from behind Crockta’s back and hit the Manticore.

“Grrung!”

The Manticore slowed down. The rays of light continued to strike the Manticore. It was the support bombardment from Tiyo’s ‘General’. Crockta grinned.

He was almost ashamed.

He tensed the muscles in his body and stared at the opponent in front of him. His muscles swelled like they were going to burst. He pushed against the ground with his strong thighs. Crockta leaped towards the Manticore with his greatsword.

The Manticore cried out, “Kuaaaaaaaaah!”

Crockta wasn't phased and shouted his battle cry, “Bul'tarrrrrrrrr————!”

A near physical pressure!

The loud roar triggered the Essence rank skill, Army Crushing Roar. The Forest of Creatures instantly shook. The Manticore hesitated. A tremendous momentum was coming from the small orc rushing towards it.

Steam seemed to rise from the orc's greatsword.

The Manticore swung its paw. Crockta's Ogre Slayer and the Manticore's claws collided. Sparks flew. As soon as the two attacks clashed, the Manticore tried to bite Crockta with its sharp teeth.

“I won't allow you *dot!*”

'General' fired towards the Manticore again. The shooting was focused on the eyes. The Manticore was tormented by pain. Crockta didn't miss the gap created by the attack and stabbed Ogre Slayer into the Manticore's chest.

It was a greatsword that could tear even ogre skin. It made its way past the Manticore's thick skin and penetrated the epidermis. The blade was lodged within. The Manticore screamed, this time much louder and worse than before, “Kiyaaaaaaaaaack!”

Crockta was thrown back.

“Ugh!”

It was the same with Tiyo behind him. He shook his head. Then a black aura started to flow from the Manticore. When the Manticore swung its tail, a black spark emerged and hit Crockta.

Crockta was unable to avoid it and flew back.

“Cough!”

Blood emerged. The black aura dug into his body and tried to crush Crockta. Crockta twisted his body as he tried to resist. The energy moved around his body like a snake. He sensed that if left alone, the energy would tear his body apart from the inside.

It was at that moment.

[The Despairing Demon’s Belt (Hero) has responded to the demonic magic power.]

[Its resistance to demonic power is used.]

The belt around his waist started moving. The black energy retreated without invading Crockta any further. The belt’s steel teeth drooled. Crockta hit the belt and calmed the Demon’s Mouth down. The mouth shut and once again fell asleep.

Tiyo muttered, “That isn’t an ordinary guy *dot*.”

Now the Manticore was staring at Crockta and Tiyo with red eyes. It was already a mysterious creature but it had become more powerful after absorbing the magic power of the Forest of Creatures. The black energy was seen every time it moved.

“This is truly the Forest of Creatures.”

Crockta raised his greatsword.

His tone was casual but his body was trembling. He was unsure of how to deal with it.

“I will cover you in the rear.”

Tiyo manipulated the trigger of his rifle with a determined expression. He adjusted the output of ‘General’. General’s bullets were fired using Tiyo’s strength and would eventually endanger him, but now wasn’t the time to worry about that.

“We won’t die here.”

“Of course *dot*.”

The Manticore neared them. Crockta’s eyes shone. He read the movements of the Manticore. It shook from side to side. At that moment, the Manticore’s terrible face appeared right before his nose.

“.....!”

A tremendous speed. The ugly face resembling an old man looked at him, like it was possessed by an evil spirit. It swallowed Crockta’s upper body.

“Uwaaat!”

His vision became dark. The stench of rotten bodies coming from the Manticore wafted into his nose. The teeth would chew on his body. Crockta closed his eyes in preparation for the moment. But the Manticore’s mouth opened again. It retreated.

Crockta thrashed in search of outside air. He smelled the saliva on his body. He turned his head and checked the Manticore.

“.....!”

An arrow was lodged in the Manticore’s neck. Outside of Crockta’s field of view, another arrow flew, this time penetrating the Manticore’s cheek.

“Kieeeeh!”

Black aura rushed out from its injury. Crockta looked at where the arrows were flying from and found the same man from before. He calmly fired his bow. Another arrow pierced the Manticore.

“What are you doing?” The hunter asked. It was far away, but Crockta could clearly read his lips. Crockta nodded and focused on his greatsword. The blood vessels in his body swelled as he firmly grasped Ogre Slayer.

Leyteno’s Vigorous Greatsword Technique!

Crockta jumped up. His goal was the Manticore. Ogre Slayer tore through the Manticore’s neck. It wasn’t completely cut before of its big size, only going halfway.

The Manticore shrieked again. Blood poured out from its half cut neck. Crockta jumped up against to finish off the Manticore. The Manticore struggled but it couldn't resist. It completely lost its head and collapsed to the ground.

The ground shook as the huge mass hit it.

"Hoo..."

The Manticore's terrible face stared at Crockta. Crockta kicked it towards the opposite direction. He didn't want to see anymore. Crockta said to the hunter, "Thank you for saving us."

But the hunter didn't answer. He approached the Manticore and started to dismantle the body with his machete. First of all, he cut off the skin of the Manticore's face. Then he dissected the body and extracted a heart-like organ. A rotten smell spread out from it.

"What are you doing?"

"....."

The man wiped the blood on the machete against the Manticore's mane.

"...This guy's face can drive away many creatures. The heart is a lump of muscle, but it has the power to restore energy."

Indeed, it was the knowledge of a hunter. The man stuck his machete in the Manticore and looked at Crockta.

"Why did you guys come here? Do you like adventures?"

The hunter seemed a lot older close-up. The wrinkles on his face showed the traces of time and his beard had started to turn white, with gray hairs mixed in. However, the body was robust and didn't match the aged face.

Crockta replied, "We are going to the north through the Forest of Creatures."

The man laughed. "What does that mean?"

"Do you know about the north?"

“It is impossible. Foolish guys.”

“Huh?”

The man scoffed at Crockta as he pulled an arrow out of the Manticore’s body. “It is impossible to pass through the Forest of Creatures.”

CHAPTER 68

SEASON OF HUNTING (3)

“Why is it impossible?” Crockta asked.

The man suddenly looked at the sky. It was towards the north.

“There is no time.”

“What...?”

He packed the skin and heart of the Manticore into a sack and then he tore off the wings. Crockta and Tiyo helped harvest the Manticore’s body parts before the man, whose name was unknown, started to turn around.

Crockta and Tiyo stared blankly at his back. The man stopped moving.

“Come along.”

He started moving again. Crockta and Tiyo exchanged glances before following. The man spoke in a tone that seemed to be mocking them, “The Manticore is dead, but others will come.”

Tiyo grumbled, “Then why did you help us instead of leaving us to die?”

“I didn’t want to.” The man glanced at Tiyo with emotionless eyes. The cool gaze caused Tiyo to flinch. “But Skolla was whining.”

“Skolla? Who is that?”

He didn’t answer.

They headed to the hunter’s home.

The landscape when they were returning was different, and even the distance seemed to have increased. They hadn’t walked that long but now it was taking a long time to get back. The direction had also changed. The compass was still pointing in one

direction.

“I think the forest has changed...” Crockta muttered.

The man laughed, “This is the Forest of Creatures.”

“Is the forest constantly changing?”

“You didn’t know? You really entered without thinking.” The man adjusted the sack he was carrying. The blood of the Manticore dripped out of the bag. “Why are idiots who don’t know such things going to the north?”

“I want to find my father *dot*,” Tiyo replied first. “Do you know the adventurer Anato? My father was a great adventurer who went to the north *dot*.”

The man laughed at Tiyo, “No. I’ve never see a person go to the north.”

“Hmmm, I guess you arrived late and didn’t see him! Since when have you been here?”

The man replied in a natural tone, “For 50 years.”

“.....!”

Crockta and Tiyo’s eyes widened. The man looked like a normal middle-aged man. If he had been here for 50 years, how old was he now?

“I came here when I was 40 years old.”

“Then you are now...” Tiyo didn’t say anything else. That was already the end of the human lifespan.

“Are you perhaps a mixed race?”

“A human.”

“I can’t believe it.”

It was impossible for a 90-year-old human to be so healthy. The man added, “I am from the Shakan Clan.”

“Shakan...”

Now Tiyo nodded. Crockta didn't understand so he looked at Tiyo, who explained, “The Shakan is an old hunter clan. I heard that they had died out.”

“Do they live that long?”

“I don't know. Not much is known... maybe he is lying but...” Tiyo lowered his voice, “The Shakan are those who never forget a grudge *dot*.”

The hunter clan Shakan, those who never forgot a grudge. After hearing Tiyo's explanation, the man's back looked bleak.

“But he said 50 years, so he must've seen my father. That must be a lie *dot*.”

“Maybe they just didn't meet each other.”

“Still...”

Tiyo stared at the man's back with suspicious eyes. This time, Crockta was the one to ask a question to the man, “Do you know about the Temple of the Fallen God in the north?”

The man shook his head as he looked ahead. The silence continued.

Crockta spoke again, “Let me know your name.”

“.....” The man paused for a while before replying. “I am called Shakan.”

“Your name.”

“Shakan.”

The man was from the Shakan Clan, and his name was also Shakan. There seemed to be a story behind it.

They quietly followed Shakan.

They reached Shakan's home within a short time. The moat and thorny fence were wrapped around it. They passed through the shallow part of the moat and through the

small hole in the fence, just like when they followed the cow.

Crockta realized that the fortress had no entrance and this was the only doorway. An artifact hid the presence of this place. The moat and the fence were both strong. Even so, the entrance was concealed to minimize risk.

He was a thorough hunter.

The cows gave a long cry as they returned, "Moooooooo..."

Then Shakan laughed out loud. It was a clear laugh that was unimaginable for the man who acted coldly towards Crockta and Tiyo. Shakan approached a cow and hugged it.

"Yes, I brought them, Skolla, so don't complain anymore. Yes, yes."

It was like he was having a conversation with a cow. Crockta and Tiyo tilted their heads.

Shakan turned towards them. His hard face had relaxed. His eyes curved as he gave a gentle smile.

"My first son, Skolla." He stroked the cow's head.

"This one is Penando, and the other one is Achilles." He pointed to the cows one by one. "They are Shakan like me who will become great hunters. Say hello."

Crockta and Tiyo bowed at the innocent expression on his face. They couldn't tell if he was joking or if he just had affection for the cows. Shakan quickly fed the cows again. The cows waved their tails.

"It is the Shakan law to take care of guests," Shakan said with a mock-stern tone.

"...What is this Crockta?" Tiyo poked Crockta's side. Crockta didn't know either. He stepped forward and said, "That cow called Skolla is smart."

"Huh?" Shakan looked up from where he was patting Skolla.

"Even knowing the paths in the forest..."

"The cow?"

“That cow. You called it Skolla.”

“Huh?”

Shakan stared blankly at Crockta and then looked at Skolla again. He blinked and alternated looking between Crockta and the cow. He gazed straight at Crockta.

“Ah... yes, cow...”

Then his expression changed. The traces of the man singing to the cow couldn't be seen anymore as it returned to the same cold expression from when he first met Crockta and Tiyo.

“Yes. Cow. A cow. Is this cow smart?”

“Yes.”

“That is strange. A cow is just a cow. I just raise them for the milk.”

Crockta got goose bumps at the sudden change in attitude. It was a hard conversation.

“You introduced it as your son.”

“What?” But Shakan was still confused. “What are you saying?”

“Huh?”

“My sons are all dead.”

“You said Skolla...”

He blinked in confusion. Crockta spoke again. “You said that the cows were called Skolla, Penando, and Achilles.”

“Me?” The man was confused. What was with this expression? Then he shook his head. “... I just named the cows after my dead sons. There is no meaning. The dead are dead.”

Then he entered the log cabin. The cow called Skolla let out a long cry, “Moooooooo...”

“.....”

Crockta felt a chill.

The man had spent 50 years in this place. He lived alone in the Forest of Creatures where no one came. It was natural to turn strange after enduring such lonely and dangerous times.

“Crockta...” Tiyo called his name from behind. “Is it okay to stay here...?”

Tiyo seemed reluctant after seeing Shakan’s behavior. Crockta placed a hand on Tiyo’s shoulder.

“I don’t think he is a bad person so let’s hear more about the forest.”

Crockta and Tiyo entered the house after Shakan.

As soon as they entered, the skull of a creature could be seen. A giant head. It was like a human but the skull was much bigger, the mouth protruded and the teeth were as sharp as saw blades. An ogre’s skull. But there were two of them. The two skulls were placed side by side like they were linked.

“Twin head ogre...?”

It wasn’t just that. All types of skulls were displayed, testifying to Shakan’s past. In addition to skulls, things such as hands, teeth and shin bones acted as his hunting record. It seemed like a bones museum. He hunted all these things alone in the Forest of Creatures. Hunting tools were hung in a corner. He had everything from a long bow, knives, axes and anything else that a hunter would need.

“Is stew made with vegetables and eggs okay?” Shakan’s voice was heard from behind.

“Thank you.”

“Just wait.”

The smell of food filled the room. Crockta and Tiyo entered the kitchen. Steam was coming up from the pot that Shakan was boiling. Crockta and Tiyo sat down at the table.

“Can I do anything to help...?”

“No.”

It was a cold reply. Tiyo pouted.

Within a short time, the hearty stew was finished. Shakan scooped plenty of stew into the bowl. Shakan’s face seemed softer in the warm light of the house.

“Why were you going to the north again?” He asked as he passed by. Tiyo replied.

“I want to find my father *dot*. Crockta is searching for the Temple of the Fallen God *dot*. And also...” Tiyo drank the stew and continued, “Of course, it is also to go on an adventure. I want to see new places *dot*.”

“Adventure...”

Shakan looked down at his fingers. “Are you curious about new places?”

“Of course *dot*. I can see the way that civilizations have evolved *dot*! Challenge and response!”

“Challenge...” He laughed. “My sons also did that.”

Crockta and Tiyo became quiet as the word ‘sons’ came out again.

Shakan got up and brought out warm milk. “My sons would’ve become great Shakan hunters. The Shakan are the best hunters.”

Shakan took a posture like he was pulling a bowstring.

“Hunters must be cautious, bold and patient. My first son, Skolla hid in the mud for over a month to catch drakes. In the end, he shot an arrow into its mouth. Isn’t that great patience? It was the first time in Shakan history that someone caught a drake. Huhuhuhu.”

Crockta and Tiyo’s spoons slowed down.

“We are the last Shakan, but I believed that my sons would spread the name of Shakan again.”

“The last Shakan...?”

“They all died. Now those who remember the Shakan have disappeared, and Shakan has become an old name. So my first son Skolla planned something huge for the resurrection of Shakan. He planned to open up the north to let the entire continent know the name of Shakan.”

“What do you mean by opening the north?”

“He said he would get rid of the Forest of Creatures with his own hands!”

Tiyo’s eyes shone.

“So he left for the Forest of Creatures. So, the source of the Forest of Creatures... that... what happened...” Shakan scratched his head. His face became confused. “Ahh...”

He grabbed his head. “What is today? Wait... my head hurts. Wait a bit...”

He left the room.

Crockta and Tiyo ate the vegetable stew in a heavy silence.



‘Father, I will open the north!’

You can’t. It is too dangerous.

‘I can do it. We are Shakan.’

The Shakan are hunters, not heroes. That thing is too scary.

‘The founder of the Shakan hunted a dragon and took its heart to open the Shakan bloodline. I’m not scared at all. We were born with dragon’s blood.’

You are obviously an exceptional hunter. Maybe even better than me. But Son...

‘I can do it. It is a mission for the last Shakan.’

Shakan chewed on the meat. His teeth grabbed onto hard muscles. He endured it. His esophagus shook as the blood rushed down his throat. He opened his eyes. Vivid memories appeared everywhere around him.

‘Father. A Shakan never forgets his enemies.’

You can’t. It is too dangerous.

‘This is my brother’s will.’

It isn’t something you can hunt.

‘There is nothing that the Shakan can’t hunt. And we are Shakan.’

My words...

‘A Shakan can’t let their enemies live!’

Reality and memories mixed together, causing his head to become heavy. The past memories weighed down on his shoulders. His breathing was painful but he endured it.

“It is that season again...”

He chewed on the last piece of meat. His spirit cleared. The iron taste of blood reminded him of arrowheads and blades. His body was tense and his muscles swelled.

This was the last chance. Maybe these visitors were the last blessing given to him.

His end wouldn’t be lonely. His sons. And...

‘I can’t live any longer.’

His wife.



Shakan returned. He looked cold like when they first saw him. This wasn’t the man excited when talking about his sons.

There was something around his mouth.

“Your mouth...?”

“Um.”

Shakan wiped at his mouth. It looked like a bloodstain to Crockta.

Shakan looked at both Crockta and Tiyo. “Do you really want to go to the north?”

“That’s right *dot*.”

“Yes.”

Crockta and Tiyo replied at the same time.

“Despite the dangers?”

Crockta nodded. They had been prepared for danger the moment they started.

“Then I will let you know. There is only one way to go to the north.”

Shakan sat down. His face became solemn. Light shone on the wrinkled face.

“You must kill the evil ‘beast’.”

CHAPTER 69

SEASON OF HUNTING (4)

Shakan looked at Crockta and Tiyo, who were asleep, and went outside.

It was nighttime. He looked up at the night sky where countless stars were shining up high. The constellations could still be seen in this cursed place. The hunter was looking at a dragon in the sky.

Shakan gathered branches and started cutting arrows. One stroke, another stroke, his head cleared every time he carved the tree branches.

He couldn't distinguish between yesterday, today, or tomorrow, due to the long time he spent here. The memories of those who had already left him mixed up with the upcoming hunt. His body was already broken from the inside after eating countless creatures. His brain and spinal cord were already that of a creature.

So there was only one chance left.

He aimed at the dark forest while gauging the proportions of the newly created arrows. A good hunter only needed one shot. He had to penetrate the core of the darkness.

He muttered, "A Shakan never leaves his enemies alive."

His head was clear. The confusion in his head was no longer important as he recalled the darkness. He shrugged everything off until only one thought passed through his head. It was as clear as day.

Kill the 'beast.' The day would soon come.

The last hunt was like this. Once the day became bright, he would leave for the hunt with two outsiders. They would be his hounds.

Kill it or die. There were no alternatives. He always sought the enemy. The beast would be aware that Shakan was moving in the darkness while it came time for hunting season.

He opened his eyes and looked up at the sky again. The constellations were growing dark. The evil nature of the forest dyed the moon red, into a capricious and wicked demon. He would cut at the middle of that moon.

"I believe in fate," Shakan said.

Crockta cocked his head at the sudden words.

They had left the fortress early in the morning. Shakan stared at the cows for a while before leaving. However, Shakan didn't treat the cows as his sons. He had the cold appearance of a hunter, just like when they first met.

Tension could be seen in his whole body. Shakan never made mistakes when he hunted.

"I don't believe in fate." Crockta replied.

"Just like an orc."

"Do you know orcs?"

"The Shakan hunt anything."

Shakan chuckled. Crockta's eyes sharpened. Shakan smiled and shook his head, "It is a joke. I knew an orc hunter."

"Orc hunter?"

"Yes. A hunter I acknowledge."

Crockta hadn't seen many orc hunters. Orcs were usually warriors or shamans. But he met one powerful hunter before leaving Orcrox. The hunter Zankus, who shot down the sun. The hunter's eyes had glanced at Crockta like he was prey.

Shakan said, "It was someone called Zankus."

“.....!”

“At the time, he was a fledgling, but he must’ve become quite good by now.”

Zankus was one of the praised orcs. All of Orcrox had been surprised when Zankus had arrived for Lenox’s funeral. Shakan treated that Zankus as a novice. He looked different.

He was a hunter who could handle a Wyvern and Manticore instantly. Crockta glanced at Shakan’s movements. His mind was a little anxious but there was always something to be learned from those who have reached a certain level.

Their strength was the culmination of endless discipline.

Shakan felt Crockta’s gaze and asked, “Do you have anything to say?”

Then he pulled back his bowstring.

Piing.

His arrow penetrated the forest at dawn. Something collapsed in the distance, a creature that Crockta and Tiyo hadn’t noticed.

“Hunters depend on each other. No communication will put our lives at risk.”

That was why Shakan started talking. As they walked through the darkness, the corpse of the creature Shakan killed appeared. Troll. But the whole body was decayed and the bones exposed. It looked like it had died a long time ago.

“An undead troll.”

As they headed deeper into the forest, the stronger the creatures became. It was a cursed land where creatures and dead monsters fought together.

“This is the strength of that bastard.”

Shakan seemed to know the ‘beast.’ Crockta opened his mouth, “Why do you want to hunt that beast?”

It was a question he had wanted to ask before. Crockta had a vague idea.

'A Shakan can't let their enemies live.' Shakan was like a madman when he talked about his dead sons. He had looked towards the darkness of the forest when talking about the enemy. There had to be a story.

"It is as you have guessed."

Shakan pulled out the arrow from the undead troll. The arrowhead was tinged black.

"My son wanted to hunt it and died. My other two sons entered the Forest of Creatures to get revenge for their brother and died. I lost my wife in the aftermath."

His voice was detached as he recounted the story, "I am here for revenge, but they were Shakan. More Shakan than me."

"I'm sorry I asked."

"No." Shakan stared into the darkness. Despite it being dawn, the dense vegetation of the forest blocked the sun. "I believe in fate. All Shakan believe in fate to a certain extent."

Suddenly, something was felt in the darkness. Tiyo aimed his muzzle from where he had been quietly following behind them. Crockta also pulled out Ogre Slayer and prepared for battle.

"Maybe we were destined to meet."

What appeared was a group of ogres. The three ogres' eyes flashed as the group was spotted. A battle cry shook the tranquil forest. It was from Crockta, not the ogres. His momentum overwhelmed the ogres. He rushed towards the ogres with his big greatsword.

Colorful magic power supported Crockta's charge. 'Ogre Slayer' tore through the forest.

Shakan had traveled across the continent and hunted everything. Sometimes he fought with orcs.

"Bul'tarrrrrrrrrrr———!"

However, he had never seen a true orc warrior. He narrowly avoided the enemy's

attacks using his battle senses and then overwhelmed the enemy with his greatsword. He seemed like a human machine that suppressed his enemies with his swordsmanship. At the necessary moment, his power would burst out against the enemy.

“Only this much————!”

Crockta shouted as he was kicked by an ogre. He stabbed the greatsword into the ogre’s abdomen, causing blood to pour out. Crockta swung his greatsword madly at the ogre. Blood dripped down. The ogre collapsed, blood foaming at its mouth.

The bloody Crockta glared at the remaining enemies. The ogres were caught by that momentum. A fighting spirit that never broke.

“Fate.”

Was it a coincidence that a warrior appeared for his last hunt? If that wasn’t fate, then what was?

Shakan smiled and pulled back his bowstring. The orc wasn’t there yet, but he would be great in the future. The image of the hunter Zankus, whom he had met a long time ago, was superimposed over this orc warrior.

It was the duty of a veteran to give advice to the young and inexperienced.

Shakan kept pulling back his bowstring.

The two remaining ogres were forcing Crockta to be on the defensive. Tiyo’s magic bullets struck one ogre while the other one aimed its huge fist at Crockta.

Shakan let go.

Shakan had the bloodline of a dragon hunter who hunted a dragon and drank its blood. The bodies of the ogres stiffened as his arrow became invisible and pierced through the two ogres at the same time.

“.....!”

There was no fuss as the two ogres fell to the ground like they were asleep. Crockta stared at him.

"A-Amazing *dot*."

Tiyo also felt admiration. Shakan just shrugged. He had just pierced the required spot with as much force as necessary. If he did that, the enemy's breath would stop.

Hunting was a tranquil task.



"Do you know why the Forest of Creatures is like this?" Crockta panted as he looked up.

They advanced while killing many creatures.

Before, they had still been at the entrance of the Forest of Creatures. Once they arrived at the center, creatures such as trolls, ogres, and wyverns endlessly attacked. Crockta's greatsword cut their necks without resting, but the creatures didn't die as they were resurrected and caught by the party again. They attacked the trio of monsters who died, resurrected, and died again.

It was a scene like hell.

"How can a crazy place like this exist? Is it really because of the legend?"

Crockta asked. It was something that Dr. Gnome from Quantas had said in passing. There was a legend that demonic power flowed out from a wicked creature buried here. To find out more, he needed to speak to the theology professor but she was missing from Quantas.

"That's right," Shakan spoke while picking up the arrows.

The number of arrows was gradually diminishing due to the repeated battles.

"Is there really an ancient demon buried here?" Tiyo asked as he flopped down to the ground, holding 'General' with a weary expression.

"Not exactly, there is a beast that has digested the body of something buried here and became a monster."

".....!"

“At one time, the Shakans were interested in the Forest of Creatures as a hunting ground. They wanted to know the cause of the endless creatures emerging. They eventually failed, but in turn discovered what type of monster it was.

Shaken pulled Tiyo up. Tiyo grabbed his hand and rubbed away the dirt from his ass. It was time to move again.

“I call it the behemoth.”

“Behemoth.”

“It ate the legend and became a monster; however, because of that, it can’t leave this place. I’m glad. It has regular periods of hibernation. Once a year, there is a season where it will wake up. Now is that season. The north won’t open until you finally kill it.”

They headed towards the center of the forest. The sun was up but the horizon was dark due to the lush greenery.

“You appeared in the season of its awakening.”

“A coincidence.”

“Fate.” Shakan smiled. He could feel fate’s hand pushing his back.

Both of them had excellent skills. Apart from the orc warrior, the gnome also skillfully handled his artifact. This was the last season of hunting and these people would open the north.

“This time I won’t miss it.”

An enemy he couldn’t run from.

“We’re here.”

He could smell it. Shakan’s body became tense, but there was a smile on his face. They finally got to meet again.

Last year, he had pierced its eyes, but had been forced back. He reached the point of death but it hadn’t killed him. The fight between the two had gone on for a long time.

For the 'beast' stuck here, he was its only entertainment.

But this was the end of a bad relationship. Either way, today, one of the two would die.

"It's coming," Shakan said.

Something was raising its body.

"Kill that guy if you want to open up the north."

Crockta and Tiyo stared at it. The two eyes of the 'beast' shone. It slowly raised its head. The behemoth looked down at them from a very high place.

"Oh my god..."

A giant monster. Thick limbs. It looked a hippopotamus and was much bigger than an ogre. It was a big monster that seemed the size of several elephants combined together.

It looked down at them and laughed.

Tiyo was overwhelmed by its huge appearance. "Something so large..."

Crockta forcibly moved his stiff body and grasped his greatsword. The enemy's size wasn't important. "Shakan. Are you willing to hunt that thing? Kulkulkul."

His old habit of laughing in front of seemingly impossible missions popped up.

"Of course." Shakan's voice was determined.

Crockta declared, "Then let's go."

"Yes." Shakan pulled his big bow. He pressed his mouth against the bow. "Show me that orc warriors aren't loud and fragile."

Crockta joked, "Is it true that the Shakan aren't just bluffing rabbits?"

Shakan laughed, "I'll show you."

"I will do the same."

Just as they prepared to launch their attacks...

Bright flashes of light flew from behind them towards the behemoth.

Tiyo fired 'General' and shouted, "There's too much talking. The most courageous one here is a gnome *dot!*"

Crockta burst out laughing. Then they rushed towards the behemoth.

CHAPTER 70

OPENING THE NORTH (1)

“Its weaknesses are in its eyes and stomach!” Shakan shouted.

The behemoth’s thick skin was a near impossible challenge, so the answer Shakan found were the eyes and stomach.

“I see!”

Crockta raised his speed. Now he was almost at the behemoth. The behemoth didn’t move as it watched Crockta’s movements like it was expecting an attack. It happened the moment Crockta entered between the behemoth’s two big paws.

The behemoth stamped its feet, causing the earth beneath it to shake. The behemoth’s foot was about the size of a house, causing what seemed like an earthquake. Crockta desperately tried to avoid it while maintaining his balance. It was like a huge press machine constantly descending towards him.

“Good luck, Crockta,” Shakan muttered as he watched.

Someone had to draw the behemoth’s gaze, and Crockta was perfect for that role. The skin of the belly was pointed out as a weak point, but it was almost impossible to stab there directly. Now, the only thing that remained was their share.

“Tiyo, aim for the eyes.”

“I understand dot!”

“There is a forest where the regeneration of creatures is close to infinite. However, if you hit the eyes then you can temporarily stop it.”

In the past, Shakan had pierced the behemoth’s eyes, causing it to jump around in a huge rage. However, after a while, dark energy appeared and restored it, like the eye hadn’t been hurt in the first place.

He had been helpless in front of such an immortal monster. But this time would be

different.

Tiyo's 'General' emitted a bright color and attacked the behemoth's eyes. It wasn't lethal, but the artifact was effective in shaking the enemy and stopping its movements. The behemoth shook its head and General's bullets started to veer from their target.

"Shit."

"Calm down."

"The muzzle is shaking *dot...*"

Tiyo lamented and started to kneel. Shakan was confused.

"Tiyo?"

Kneeling during battle. Kneeling was traditionally a sign of submission. However, Tiyo's expression was still determined. It wasn't the expression of a loser.

Then Shakan muttered as he saw Tiyo's next move, "Indeed..."

This was a technique of the Quantas Gnomes Garrison. Tiyo was in a 'down shooting' position.

It had the highest precision that was incomparable to shooting while standing. It was a ruthless position that showed no signs of mercy, a form of marksmanship that intended to thoroughly crush the enemy.

"Aim cruelly and mercilessly."

The earth and the body united to aim at the enemy. The specialty of a rifle that couldn't be imitated by archery. Tiyo's General fired.

"...Dammit!"

But his shooting was significantly off the mark. Tiyo hadn't taken into account the behemoth's great height. With his prone position, he couldn't raise his aim high enough to hit the eyes. At best, he could only hit the body.

Tiyo rose to his feet again.

“Failure!”

“It was a good try though.”

As they were talking carefreely, Crockta shouted desperately from underneath the behemoth, “What are you doing behind meeeee!”

A giant paw passed right underneath Crockta’s nose. Tiyo recovered his spirit as he saw that Crockta was in danger.

“Sorry *dot*! I’m trying again *dot*!”

His short legs scrambled as he hurriedly moved to a big rock and placed the rifle onto it. It was a sitting posture firing technique. Since he could lean against obstacles, it achieved the same level of precision as kneeling down and he could aim at a higher angle.

He didn’t make any mistakes this time.

“This is the strength of the Quantess gnomes!”

The magic bullet from General precisely hit the behemoth’s eye. The behemoth twisted its head.

“Kuoooooooooh!”

While the behemoth’s attention was caught by Tiyo’s shooting, Crockta took the risk and jumped between its legs. The skin of its belly was revealed before Crockta’s eyes.

“Bul’tarrrrrrr———!”

Crockta jumped while shouting. It was thinner than ogre leather, but had a stronger defense. Steam rose as he used Leyteno’s Vigorous Greatsword Technique and stabbed firmly. ‘Ogre Slayer’ barely penetrated the behemoth’s skin. The flesh was torn by the blade.

“Kuoooooooooh!”

The behemoth shouted angrily. It was a low-frequency shout that caused the earth to ring. Crockta’s eardrums were rattled. Crockta’s body became stiff. He heard the

behemoth's big feet moving. A shadow fell above Crockta's body. Crockta looked up blankly.

He couldn't avoid it.

"Bul'tar."

Crockta whispered and closed his eyes. The foot was just about to stomp on him. At that moment, a bolt flew from a distance and bounced off the behemoth.

Kwaang!

The behemoth's body was pushed back by the explosive destructive power. It was a slim arrow, but it contained enough destructive power to push back the vast behemoth.

"This is a hunter's arrow."

Shakan readied a new arrow. Crockta started to move again. Crockta fought under the behemoth's body while Shakan fired an arrow whenever it was needed.

He placed a powerful 'will' in the arrows. In the world of Elder Lord, the possibilities were endless. Just willpower!

It hit the enemy as physical force. Some called it praying while others called it aura. But for Shakan, it was just a fierce desire to pierce the enemy. Although Crota's sword contained some will, he was just barely walking along the entrance of this field.

"Look, rookies! I am the last Shakan!"

He gave a rare scream. Crockta's spirited struggle influenced Shakan as Shakan moved his body. Now it seemed like he could kill anything.

"The Shakan hunt everything! Now it is your turn!"

The behemoth's gaze turned to Shakan like it understood. It ignored Crockta annoying it and started to move.

Kuuong!

Kuuong!

“Scatter, Tiyo!” Shakan shouted.

Shakan and Tiyo quickly retreated. But due to the difference in size, it was inevitable that the behemoth would arrive quickly. There was a huge shadow over their heads.

“Don’t ignore meeeeeee————!”

A roar containing willpower!

Crockta had followed the behemoth and jumped up while swinging Ogre Slayer. The greatsword was lodged in its buttocks and Crockta clung on tightly. The behemoth shook its lower body but it couldn’t get rid of Crockta.

“Don’t look at anyone other than me, monster!”

Crockta grinned. Then he used the greatsword to climb to the top of the behemoth. The behemoth twisted before losing its balance and falling down. Crockta removed Ogre Slayer from its ass. The behemoth was troubled by the pain.

“Now!”

Tiyo and Shakan launched their attacks. Tiyo’s magic bullets struck the behemoth’s body while Shakan fired arrows all over the place. The behemoth was in pain. Crockta headed towards its head. The angry behemoth opened its mouth.

Right now, the size difference wasn’t a huge advantage.

“Kuaaaaaaaaaah!

It was a horrible shriek! The shout was terrible enough to paralyze them.

Then the behemoth breathed in. The demonic energy of the surrounding area was sucked into the behemoth’s mouth. Crockta stabbed Ogre Slayer into the behemoth’s back, but the behemoth continued to breathe in.

A tremendous concentration of demonic power started to form in the behemoth’s mouth. Tiyo couldn’t stand it as he turned his head and covered his eyes. It wasn’t because the light was too dazzling for his eyes.

On the contrary, the darkness was too thick. It felt terrifying; it was like his soul was being sucked in.

Shakan's opened his eyes wide and resisted it. He aimed his arrow at the darkness inside the mouth.

'This is the behemoth's imperial wrath.'

Shakan knew that attacking its eyes and belly wasn't enough to kill it. He found out that the real weakness of the behemoth was the sensitive mouth, just like a dragon.

Just like a dragon could use breath, the behemoth was able to shoot out the deadly demonic magic. There was a short moment when the condensed energy would flash with a brilliant color. It was the authority of a breath attack.

He needed to penetrate through it. Shakan gritted his teeth. The energy was now aiming at Shakan. Tiyo was already running away. However, Shakan stood in his spot and confronted it.

"Shakan! Avoid it!"

Tiyo shouted. But the sound didn't reach Shakan's ears. Laughter emerged. A gust of wind swept through his hair. His body seemed to be pushed back. But he never moved his gaze from the center of the storm.

'Father, we are Shakan.'

"Yes, we are Shakan."

He didn't have a name. Only Shakan. He was Skolla, Penando, Achilles, and in addition, his dead wife. The history of all the Shakan on the continent flashed through his head. The weight of the clan was on his shoulders. Therefore, he wasn't a single hunter, but the Shakan Clan itself.

"We killed a dragon and started the Shakan lineage!" Shakan shouted like it was his last hurrah.

His voice didn't reach far, as it was swept away by the storm. But he didn't stop as he shouted again.

“I’m going to kill you! Behemoth!”

He pulled back the bowstring to its maximum extent. His will was nestled in the arrow. Both his endless hatred and resentment towards the behemoth were placed on it.

The dark breath of the behemoth converged towards him. It was the darkness that didn’t allow anything to shine while erasing the world.

Crockta on the behemoth’s back and the fleeing Tiyo wouldn’t be affected by the disaster. They could survive.

‘Penetrate the core of darkness.’

He had no other choice. A flash of light divided the darkness. As it penetrated the darkness, it gradually became a light that swept up the darkness. The beam of light moved through the darkness. It was a straight line without any errors.

‘Open up the North!’



There was a blast.

The two forces hit each other and everything around them was swept away. Crockta fell off the behemoth’s back and rolled for a long time. He could barely raise his head after a while.

The behemoth flopped down.

Crockta relied on Ogre Slayer as he barely managed to raise his body. Black smoke was coming from the half of the behemoth’s head that remained. Shakan did it.

“Shakan!”

Crockta moved his body to search for them.

“Shakan! Tiyo!”

Tiyo avoided the breath but Shakan had faced it directly. Crockta jumped in the direction where Shakan had been.

“Shakan!”

The breath had destroyed everything. The land had a deep hole in the shape of a hemisphere. In the center of the hole was Shakan. Dust rose as Crockta hurried down the slope.

“Shakan!”

He almost fell but he managed to reach Shakan. Shakan wasn’t fine. There was a pool of blood around his body in the hole. Crockta held him. Shakan had a large hole in the middle of his body. Blood and guts flowed from it.

“Crockta...”

He was near death. However, his voice was the most cheerful Crockta had ever heard it. Shakan smiled faintly.

“Did I get it...?”

Crockta clenched his teeth and endured it. Then he nodded.

“You got it.”

“How is it? Is Shakan a rabbit now...?”

Crockta smiled and shook his head. Then he touched Shakan’s cheek. It was gradually cooling. “No, the Shakan hunter pedigree is evident. You have caught your target.”

“Kuhuhuhu...” Shakan coughed up blood while laughing. Crockta calmed him down.

“Say no more.”

“It’s okay. Now there is no...”

The moment that Shakan spoke. His eyes suddenly grew larger and they trembled Crockta realized that something was wrong. Crockta could see the scene in Shakan’s eyes.

“Grrrrrrrr...”

In Shakan's eyes, a huge creature was standing up again. It was the behemoth.

"Oh my god."

He couldn't recognize the shape because half the head was gone. It shouldn't have been able to stand up after receiving that much damage. But what was the sight before him now? Crockta turned his head.

Darkness was swirling around the behemoth's wounds. The darkness was repairing and replacing its wounds. It was missing half its head but a red light shone in the darkness.

At that moment, Crockta felt despair. They wouldn't be able to win.

He realized it. It was the first time he felt such a complete feeling of helplessness since he began Elder Lord. It was impossible to kill the behemoth.

Crockta dropped his head.

"Shakan..."

Shakan was talking, "A Shakan never leaves his enemies alive..."

His body shook. He tried to raise his body from the ground. However, his intestines flowed from the hole in his belly.

"Shakan!"

"The bag, open it..." Shakan whispered.

Crockta shook his head and spoke, "It is okay now. You've done enough."

Crockta tried to pacify him. But Shakan exploded angrily at Crockta. It was hard to believe the dying body could make such a sound.

"Shut up!"

".....!"

"I told you to open the bag! Crockta!"

Crockta looked into his eyes. Fire was burning in it. An indomitable will.

That was it.

In the end, Crockta was forced to agree. He removed the bag from Shakan's bag and opened it. A rotting stench came from the bag.

"This..."

Inside the bag was a huge heart. The core of it was already rotting. It was the heart of the manticore that they killed. It was polluted with an awful smell. Crockta held it with trembling hands.

"Feed it to me."

Shakan said with a sigh.

".....!"

"Put it in my mouth."

Crockta saw the tenacity in his blazing eyes.

Then he realized.

Shakan had repaired his collapsing body by killing creatures and eating their hearts. This was why he didn't look his age, the reason for his broken mind, and why he couldn't distinguish between the past and present.

His body was already the same as all the monsters here, eroded by the demonic energy. However, his blood was still red.

Crockta was unable to resist Shakan's burning gaze and raised the heart to his mouth.

Shakan chewed on it. He opened his jaw and bit it with force. He chewed on the muscles and absorbed its blood and magic power.

His eyes were still blazing.

"The founder of Shakan killed a dragon and ate it."

The black energy started to repair his body. His eyes were now black. He got up. The broken body had been stuck together like glue. He vomited up a black liquid. It was the same as the creatures.

“I have to become a monster if I want to kill a monster.”

He swallowed the heart until the end. His neck moved as he swallowed. Shakan laughed. He laughed as the black energy spread. He grasped the bow on his back. His eyes burned red. Soon, the creature called Shakan raised his body.

The behemoth cried out loud as it noticed his presence. The two monsters stared at each other.

CHAPTER 71

OPENING THE NORTH (2)

Numerous arrows flew through the air and became embedded in the behemoth's body.

The behemoth stomped its feet as it ran. Shakan quickly retreated. The land that the behemoth passed became ruined. Shakan fired his arrows but the behemoth wasn't injured. It just continued chasing Shakan. Even if there was a wound, the demonic energy would just restore the body.

The whole forest was helping the behemoth. Shakan resisted with the power he gained from chewing the heart but it wasn't enough. If Shakan's body was a pit, the behemoth was like an ocean.

Looking at the scene, Crockta thought of the most necessary action right now. The behemoth was like an army with unlimited people and resources. There was no end. Crockta needed to block the spread of the demonic energy.

But how could he cut off the magic power of the forest?

Crockta looked at the darkness that spread over the forest like an abyss. It was the wall of darkness that the behemoth was guarding. This was the wall divided the rest of the continent and the north.

No one could pass beyond this.

'Not exactly, there is a beast that has digested the body of something buried here and became a monster.'

Shakan's words popped into his head. There was something. At that moment, the Demon's Mouth at Crockta's waist started moving.

".....!"

The belt was pulling Crockta towards the darkness in front of him.

Crockta turned around. Shakan and the behemoth were destroying the forest while

fighting. Arrows flew towards the behemoth's body while the behemoth ignored all attacks and aimed for Shakan.

Kuoooooh!

It was a fight between monsters that disregarded life and death. Shakan's desperate resistance was felt in his commitment.

'Hunters depend on each other.'

Shakan's voice was revived. That's right. They were now one. They had to rely on each other. They entrusted their lives to each other.

Suddenly, Crockta locked gazes with Shakan who was fighting. It was just a quick glance but it was enough. He made up his mind.

Crockta ran towards the darkness. As if it was waiting, the darkness welcomed Crockta. It was like when he was eaten by the Demon's Mouth. His spirit sank towards the darkness.



Crockta's spirit was standing inside a cave. It was an endless tunnel. Crockta couldn't tell where to go. The belt at his waist led Crockta. It pulled him towards the front.

The Demon's Mouth was reacting to something.

But it couldn't be reversed. Crockta pulled out his greatsword and walked in the direction that the belt pulled him. The inside was dark and his vision blurred. He walked for a while.

A large area appeared. It was a space covered in darkness. In the middle of it, a giant body was lying down. The rotten stench of the corpse pierced his nose. Crockta raised his greatsword and stepped towards it.

It was an enormous beast that wasn't any smaller than the behemoth. But it didn't move like it was dead. Crockta sensed that it was something evil like the legend. The behemoth had become a monster after eating it.

A terrible demonic energy was coming from the body. It was a darkness of an

unprecedented depth that couldn't be compared to the behemoth's breath. It was the source that created the Forest of Creatures.

He had to get rid of it. If he could get rid of it, the behemoth would lose its unlimited power.

Crockta stepped forward. The demonic energy was like a swamp. Every movement was like walking through water resistance. Crockta firmly took a step forward. It seemed even bigger when he stood in front of it. What terrible thing would happen if this thing was alive? What was its identity?

Crockta stabbed the body with his greatsword. It entered without any resistance. Demonic energy emerged from the torn place. That density locked on Crockta.

"What is this...?"

At that moment. The Despairing Demon's Belt responded, "You...?"

Suddenly, the child of darkness stood beside Crockta. It was the appearance of the demon that he found inside the belt. It didn't care about Crockta as it stared at the body of the monster. Somehow it seemed sad.

'Poor thing' seemed to emerge from it. The demon raised a hand towards the monster's body. A whisper was heard again.

'Poor thing, Amon.'

Then the demon looked at Crockta. Crockta faced him. The dark eyes stared at him. Then the demon nodded and disappeared.

At the same time, the steel teeth at his waist started rattling.

"What...?"

The Demon's Mouth opened widely. It became wider, wider and wider. It was an unrealistic expansion. The greedy mouth was now bigger than Crockta. It felt like it could devour the entire cave.

The mouth swallowed the beast's remains.

The steel teeth surrounded the monster's huge body. There was a dull clang as the iron teeth closed. The Demon's Mouth slowly pushed the remains of the monster inside, like a boa constrictor devouring its prey.

".....!"

The dead beast was being eaten by the Despairing Demon's Mouth. The demonic energy shook. Crockta gritted his teeth. His body was screaming from the overload of demonic energy. His veins bulged.

But he wouldn't lose.

Bul'tarr—!

Crockta shouted. His battle shout rang out in the darkness.

Bul'tarrrrrr—!

He shouted again. Crockta endured the pain surging through his entire body.

Some time passed. Crockta struggled for a while before he finally opened his eyes. There was nothing. The huge body and mouth that swallowed it had disappeared. Crockta stood alone in this wide cave.

He looked down at the belt around his waist.

".....!"

The belt had changed. In the place where the steel teeth touched together, horns had sprouted. It seemed to be gradually taking the form of a demon's skull.

[The Despairing Demon's Belt (Hero) has grown.]

[You still can't control the power of the belt. The power of the belt has been limited.]

[The demon is sleeping.]

The system messages popped up. Crockta felt like his whole body was full of an unknown power. Then the landscape changed.



Crockta stood within the Forest of Creatures again.

“Kuoooooooooh!”

The behemoth’s roar could be heard. He looked back and saw that Shakan and the behemoth were still fighting. It seemed like Tiyo had returned as distinctively colorful magic power was striking the behemoth.

Crockta ran towards the battle scene.

Shakan’s arrow struck the behemoth’s body again. The behemoth’s body lurched. Little by little, flesh started falling off.

The behemoth twisted from the pain. Demonic aura emerged from the wound, but not as quickly as before. Tiyo’s magic bullet aimed towards the spot where the flesh fell off. The behemoth’s body shook.

It seemed to be troubled. After the Demon’s Mouth swallowed the remains of the dead beast, the behemoth lost the unrestrained magic that it had been enjoying until now.

They could win. Crockta’s forehead started burning.

[Combative Spirit (Essence) has been used.]

[Your assimilation rate has risen.]

Crockta jumped off the ground. He stepped on the behemoth’s tail and threw himself forward once again. The goal was the behemoth. Crockta jumped using all his strength while holding the greatsword. He used the weight of gravity to shove the greatsword deeply into the behemoth’s back.

Puooook!

The greatsword was stabbed up to its handle. The behemoth started experiencing spasms. Blood appeared on Crockta's face. Crockta grabbed the Ogre Slayer and twisted it. It caused another wound. There was a terrible sound.

The screams of the beast shook the entire forest. The agitated behemoth opened its mouth.

The demonic energy of the forest converged into the behemoth's mouth. It sucked in its breath. The behemoth was once again preparing the breath attack. Its goal was the enemy with arrows in front of it, Shakan.

Crockta hung on the behemoth's back and looked at Shakan in front. Shakan didn't try to avoid it. He just aimed his bow towards the front.

Shakan met Crockta's gaze and laughed.

"Kuwooooooooooh!"

Soon the darkness of the breath covered his face. Crockta's vision was covered with darkness. The breath was bigger and stronger than before. The behemoth was squeezing out all of its power as a last resort.

At that moment. In a corner of the darkness, one bright spot flew. It was a beam of light.

Behemoth, the one who ruled the Forest of Creatures and divided the north from the rest of the continent. Then the darkness coming from the monster faded. The beam had gone straight through it.

Crockta witnessed the light penetrating the core of darkness. It was a clear penetration.

The source of the behemoth's power had collapsed due to Crockta. It was the end of the behemoth.

Crockta rolled to the ground in the aftermath. The behemoth collapsed with the greatsword in it. He pulled it out. Dead blood flowed from it.

Crockta ran to Shakan.

“Shakan!”

Shakan was squirming in the middle of the land that had been swept away. Crockta approached. His eyes gazed far away before turning back to Crockta. His eyes were dim.

“Did... you see...”

He smiled. Crockta nodded. “It is the ultimate hunt.”

“Cough, cough! Yes, this is Shakan...”

Crockta touched Shakan’s cheek.

He couldn’t bear to look down at the body. The area underneath Shakan’s belly had completely disappeared. The demonic energy in his body tried to heal him, but he gradually lost his vitality and went limp.

Shakan looked into the distance. Then he smiled.

“I did it, sons... Karina...” It was a warm voice. “A Shakan never leaves his enemies alive...”

He turned his head and said to Crockta. “Orc warrior... gnome... pretty good...”

Crockta nodded. The life in Shakan’s eyes gradually disappeared. They became out of focus. It was the sight of death. What did he see?

Crockta asked, “What is your name?”

Crockta wanted to remember his true name.

Shakan’s mouth rose. He whispered in a small voice, “Shakan.”

Then his head fell down. The last Shakan hunter traversed death and entered the underworld as a nameless Shakan. The hunter who endured the pain for a long time to get revenge for his family. It was the death of a great man.

Crockta closed Shakan's eyes.

"Crockta, you're safe!"

Tiyo rushed over. His body was also tattered because he was caught in the breath. Tiyo became silent as he saw Shakan. The silent Crockta patted Tiyo's shoulder.

[The quest to open the north has been completed.]

[The north has been opened.]

[The demonic energy blocking the north from the rest of the continent will gradually disappear.

[10 years remain until it is fully opened.]

[50 years remain until all the demonic energy is completely removed.]

[The name of the hero who opened the north will become widely known on the continent.]

[The name of the one who opened the north, the orc warrior Crockta...]

Crockta opened his mouth as the system messages popped up.

"No."

Surprisingly, the output of system messages stopped.

"The name of the one who opened the north is Shakan." He spoke firmly, "The great hunter Shakan."

The system was silent for a moment. Then it surfaced again.

[I respect your will.]

[The one who opened the north, the last of the Shakan Clan, the name of the great hunter Shakan will shake the continent.]

[The entire continent will remember his name.]

[The 'Shakan Hunter' class is opened to users. Once all the hidden conditions are met, the user can change to the hidden class 'Shakan Hunter'.]

[The name of the one who opened the north is Shakan.]

[The great hunter, Shakan.]

Crockta nodded.

[I will keep watching your progress in the future.]



“Oh, what brat! Who is it? Eh!”

This was the core of Elder Saga Corporation, the company that ran Elder Lord. It was the system control room that managed the core system 'Albino.' Park Jujin, the manager of this place was frantically shouting.

“No! How? Whose assimilation rate...!”

“Team Leader, the lock on the system was just released!”

“Up to 90%!”

“It is unlocked...”

“I heard!”

Park Jujin was hysterical.

The system had once again become temporarily inaccessible. Albino's answer was the same as before. A user broke through the 90% assimilation rate. Access was temporarily blocked for both the system and the user's protection.

Park Jujin threw away the documents. The researchers ran away.

"Find that bastard!"



Zankus took a sip from the cup of alcohol. A campfire cast shadows on his face. Zankus was sharing a fire with travelers he met during a hunt. The travelers handed meat to Zankus. He nodded to express his thanks.

Then he heard the conversation between the travelers.

"The north was opened. Was it due to a hunter?"

"Yes. The last Shakan hunter."

"He caught a monster blocking access to the north."

Zankus's eyebrows twitched. The travelers felt his gaze and looked up.

"Why, do you know him?" One of the travelers spoke in a friendly manner. They bumped into an orc hunter by chance but they had to maintain a minimum of courtesies. The orc was different from his appearance.

"A Shakan hunted the monster?"

"That's right."

"What happened to the hunter?"

"The rumor is..." The traveler became nervous as he saw Zankus' intense gaze. "He died with the monster..."

"....."

Zankus's face distorted. Then he looked into the air and laughed. There was a complicated expression on his face.

"In the end... he did it and died... that person..."

"Did you know him?"

"At one time."

Zankus' eyes became distant.

He was the most outstanding hunter Zankus knew. The Shakan hunter had been tougher than an orc, despite being human. He was the representative of tenacity. A hunter who aimed at his target, no matter what it took.

Zankus wanted to be just like that. So he aimed for that hunter's back. Then he would be in a position to be praised by the hunter. But Zankus felt like the hunter's back was still far away.

He heard the news that the hunter had entered the Forest of Creatures.

The traveler asked, "Was he also called Shakan? He was a really great person."

"That's right."

Zankus spoke. "No."

"Huh?"

"His real name isn't Shakan."

"Then...?"

Zankus shook the cup. He gazed into it and recalled his first meeting with the hunter.

Zankus had been a flamboyant young orc and looked down on the human. But he was defeated by him. When Zankus asked for his name with a feeling of admiration, the man became shy and avoided the answer.

His name was ridiculous. No one would believe that it was the name of the greatest

hunter.

The travelers looked at Zankus with expectant eyes. Zankus laughed and opened his mouth, “His real name...”

CHAPTER 72

NORTHERN ORCS (1)

Crockta and Tiyo shifted Shakan's body and made a tomb for him in his fortress.

The clever cows cried sadly at Shakan's death. The remaining livestock, including the cows, were sent back to nature outside of the Forest of Creatures.

Then they stood in front of the wall of darkness spreading across the northernmost part of the forest that the behemoth had once blocked. It was a darkness that blocked any intruders from crossing.

[Until the north is completely opened in 10 years, access will be limited.]

[As a colleague of Shakan who opened the north, you can pass through here.]

"C-Crockta, is the north really beyond this point?"

"Trust me."

Crockta and Tiyo exchanged glances before walking towards the wall. Darkness swallowed their vision. It was a strange feeling, as if they were floating in the darkness.

When they opened their eyes again, they were standing on red earth.

".....!"

"This place...?"

It was a wilderness. Behind them was the wall of darkness, but the forest behind it couldn't be seen. It was like a completely different world.

"This is the north..."

It was a desolate place. Almost no vegetation was visible on the horizon, save for the occasional cactus or they deeply rooted herbaceous plant.

“Now... what direction should we go in, Crockta?” Tiyo asked.

Their destination was the Temple of the Fallen God. Crockta pulled out a map, a piece of information that he received from the Information Guild. According to this map, a large lake will appear if we move towards the northwest.

“Indeed...”

Would there be a lake in this barren climate? Crockta checked the compass and told Tiyo, “This way.”

“I understand *dot!*”

Tiyo walked ahead.

Contrary to his expectations, it was a desolate wasteland, but it was still a new world. Only a few people from the continent had seen the north. Moreover, they were *the* adventurers who opened up the north. Tiyo started humming.

Crockta and Tiyo looked around while walking. Except for the wall of darkness, everywhere was the same. It was like the endless desert. If the desert was going to continue like this, maybe the north was just a dead land.

They would know once they followed the map. They walked for a long time towards the lake marked on the map.

“.....”

“This is the lake *dot...*?”

It was a puddle smaller than a pond. That was all. Crockta checked the map again. According to the compass and map, this was definitely the place. There were large pillars and rugged rock walls.

“At one time, it might’ve been a lake.”

The map had been made a long time ago. It could be different from the current

situation.

“Let’s relieve our dry throats first.”

“Yes, *dot*.”

The moment they reached the puddle...

A sound was heard from far away. Crockta turned his head and spotted a sand storm in the distance. A group of people was approaching this place. Tiyo took a sip of water and said, “Are we finally meeting people from the north?”

“They are riding on something.”

It wasn’t the shape of a monster. It was the appearance of people riding on something. Were they orcs, humans, or dark elves? Worry was mixed with anticipation. Crockta grasped ‘Ogre Slayer’ and waited for them with bated breath.

“Crockta, what are you nervous about? They are the northern people *dot*!” Tiyo declared.

Crockta nodded before saying, “I hope my worries are needless.”

Then he could determine the identity of the incoming group. They were orcs.

“Hey! Who are you?”

The orc in the front shouted. There was a total of five orcs. They were riding odd-looking animals that looked like rhinoceroses, except at a size that was smaller than a horse. Horns towered up on both sides and the eyes were filled with wildness.

Crockta stepped forward. “I am alive. It is nice to see you. I am the orc warrior Crockta.”

He extended his fist.

“Yes...?” The orcs looked at each other at his greeting.

“Pff...”

“Kuk...”

They chuckled before bursting out laughing, “Kulkulkulkul! Did you hear him? Alive? Kuahahahat!”

“This guy, he must’ve heard too many stories! Kulkulkulkul!”

“My mother read me the old books as well! Yes alive, you are alive! Kuhahahat!”

Crockta couldn’t understand their reactions.

“Hey, why are you doing such archaic bullshit?”

“Why did an outsider suddenly appear in our area? In addition, coming with a dwarf.”

The orcs got down from the animals. They were using weapons such as axes and swords, but they were different from the weapons that Crockta knew and loved. The size of their weapons was small, and seemed to be human weapons.

“We are the Kapur Tribe that rules this area, get on your knees!” One of the orcs pulled out his sword and shouted. Crockta stared at him blankly. The orc stomped his feet angrily at Crockta’s response.

“I said, we are the Kapur Tribe! On your knees!”

Crockta couldn’t understand it. “On my knees?”

Orcs never kneeled before another of their kind. No, it was the same with other species. Orcs would never force humiliation on someone. Rather, they would raise them up. If someone insulted them, the orc would just cut off their heads.

Those were the orcs that he knew. He would understand it more if weapons were swung.

“I don’t know what you are talking about. I am a warrior and this gnome warrior is my friend ,Tiyo. Please respect our honor.” Crockta replied patiently.

But they laughed at Crockta again. One orc grabbed his belly and shed tears. “Kuahahat! Warrior? Warrior?”

“That dwarf is a warrior? Kulkulkulkul!”

“A very funny guy! I’m going crazy!”

Then the original orc, who shouted with a sword in hand, approached Crockta.

“This person is a madman. Kehehehet!”

Mean expressions.

Crockta realized something. “Don’t.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Don’t speak.”

The faces of the orcs distorted. “What nonsense is he saying!”

Then the orc shook his sword. But he couldn’t fulfill his will. His crude sword was smashed at once.

A greatsword, too big to be a regular sword, was pointing at his neck. It was the masterpiece of the Golden Anvil Clan, ‘Ogre Slayer’!

“You guys don’t have any honor.”

“U-Uh...?”

The orc retreated. The other orcs simultaneously raised their weapons.

“You!”

“You want to die!”

The orc who lost his weapon shouted while the other four orcs surrounded Crockta, a ferocious look in their eyes. “You attacked us just now, so we can’t get over it. This guy.”

An orc holding an axe cried out angrily, “Do you want to make us angry?”

But Crockta wasn’t afraid at all. The anger of the Orcrox farmers holding farm equipment was more frightening than these orcs holding their flimsy weapons.

“Messing with the Kapur warriors...”

At that moment, Crockta’s eyebrows twitched.

“What?”

“Hehe, have you finally realized your mistake? We are warriors from the Kapur Tribe. You would run away if you saw the large number of warriors in our tribe...”

Crockta looked up at the sky. The sky above him was blue, just like it was on the continent.

However, the people under the sky were different. So different. The orcs in the north were different from the orcs on the continent that he knew. They weren’t great like Lenox or Hoyt. None of the orcs he knew were like this. Yet they called themselves warriors.

The warrior’s ceremony presided over by Tashaquil came to his mind. Something burned inside Crockta. He was an orc warrior. When he saw something like this, he couldn’t stay still.

Crockta rushed towards the axe wielding orc.

“Where are you looking?”

The axe descended. At that moment, Crockta swung his greatsword towards the descending axe. The axe shattered and the pieces flew into the air.

“Hat!”

The orc’s eyes widened as he was left with just the handle of the axe. It was a sophisticated technique that responded to the sudden attack, aimed at the axe, and used tremendous power to break it.

The serene eyes stared at him.

He wasn’t a match for this orc wearing a red headband. He realized it. The orc might act ridiculously like he was from an old storybook, but his skills were real. The axe holding orc asked in a trembling voice.

“You, where did you come from? Ragnar Tribe? The Iron Group? Or are you someone hired by the dark elves?”

“.....”

Crockta shook his head.

“Then where are you from?” The orcs stepped back cautiously. Crockta didn’t attack them anymore as he placed the big sword back on his back.

“We came from the continent to the south *dot!*” Tiyo replied instead.

The orcs’ rage exploded. “Shut up, dwarf. We didn’t ask you!”

“What’d you say?”

Tiyo immediately fired ‘General’, the magic power striking an orc. He lost his balance and fell down. He shook from the aftermath of the attack and crumpled over with a groan. The group of orcs was astonished.

“T-That is an artifact!”

The orcs exchanged glances. It seemed like they were thinking about how to treat Crockta. They gathered and started to talk about something. Their voices were faintly heard, “They might have really come from the south...”

“That is nonsense...”

“If so, the chief...”

“Trouble...”

They talked for a while before nodding. Then the orc who lost his axe to Crockta stepped out as the representative. “What is your name?”

All of a sudden, his attitude was gracious.

“Crockta.”

“Crockta, please forgive our rudeness. I’ll ask you again. Did you really come from the

south?"

Crockta nodded.

"Then you came over that wall of darkness?"

"That's right."

"Um..." The orc frowned for a moment before nodding. "Then, Crockta. You are invited to our tribe."

It was a quick transition as a smile emerged. Tiyo poked Crockta's thigh. He didn't like it. Crockta was the same but he would decide once he heard more.

"I apologize for being rude to you. It is a sensitive time due to the recent war between tribes. We made a mistake for a bit. Why don't you rest and talk with us at our tribe?"

The orc acted shamelessly until the end. Crockta didn't like it but he needed to consider the proposal itself. Crockta whispered to Tiyo, "How about it Tiyo?"

"Do you want to go with these guys?"

"Not at all. But we know nothing about the north. It might be helpful to follow them once."

"Uh... your words are reasonable *dot*..."

All they had was an old map to lead the way. It showed the natural terrain and the location of the Temple of the Fallen God, but they didn't know anything about cities and what the people were like.

The Kapur Clan were militant, so the north absolutely wasn't an easy place. Rather, it seemed rougher than the continent.

"My father always said that the north is a very dangerous place *dot*..." Tiyo muttered and nodded. "I understand *dot*. Then we will follow them for the moment."

"We will."

"But..."

Tiyo tapped 'General'.

"If they aren't good, I will have to kill Crockta's fellow people *dot*."

Crockta laughed at his decisive expression. Due to the cute appearance of his gnome friend, Crockta occasionally forgot that he was a soldier. Tiyo wasn't a person to avoid physical conflicts. Crockta showed his teeth as he laughed.

"Of course. It is the same for me."

The orc warrior and gnome soldier exchanged glances and chuckled. As soon as Crockta nodded, the orcs pointed to the animals behind them.

"Then we will give you a ride. Please get up behind us."

The orcs climbed on the animals they came on. It wasn't much different from riding a horse. Crockta and Tiyo sat behind an animal each.

"What do you call these animals?"

"Are there no caruks in the south?"

"This is the first time I've seen one. In the south, we normally use horses."

"That's right. This is an animal called caruk. Horses are precious in the north, so we mainly use the tough caruk."

The caruk started running. Their legs were short, but they moved quickly. The shaking was small compared to horses.

They went through the wilderness. The landscape didn't change and the open wasteland continued. Occasionally, an oasis could be seen, but it was mainly a wilderness filled with red sand.

They ran for a while and arrived at the Kapur Tribe. A simple fence surrounded an oasis and there were tents inside. It was very different from the modern and medieval cities on the continent. Tiyo also had a worried expression. Tiyo was from Quantas, a developed city on the continent.

"We've arrived. Wait a minute."

They waited on the outside without entering the village. One of the orcs went inside on the caruk.

“Hrmm.” Crockta looked at the orcs. They sat on the caruks with casual expressions, but a strange tension could be felt. Was it fear of him or something else? Suddenly, Crockta looked at Tiyo.

“Zzz...”

He was sleeping. He didn’t show any nerves as he slept on the Caruk. Tiyo covered the orc’s back that he was leaning against with saliva, while the orc in front twisted his body with a worried expression. The orc wanted to shake Tiyo off but he endured it. Crockta started laughing.

“Are all orcs in the south strong like you?” The orc in front of Crockta asked. Crockta replied without having to think.

“Of course.”

The true strength of warriors didn’t mean the strength of their body. It was their strength of mind. All of the orcs he met were strong.

“How great. So now people can come to the north freely?”

“It is still tough.”

According to the system, there were 10 years left until the forest would fully open. Until then, the wall of darkness would stop most of those who wanted to pass through.

The orc who entered the village soon reappeared. He beckoned towards the orcs on the caruks from the entrance of the village. The caruks raised their bodies. Crockta’s body started bouncing again.

The caruks ran into the village.

“.....”

The tribe’s orcs were watching them with hostile gazes. There was a large lot in the center of the village where a huge orc was sitting on a chair. It seemed he was showing off his authority by wearing skulls as decoration.

Behind him, numerous Kapur Tribe warriors stared at Crockta and Tiyo.

“I see Chief!”

The orcs quickly dismounted from the caruk and knelt. Crockta and Tiyo just watched them. The Kapur chief rose from his seat. He was a fearsome orc who was larger than usual. His greedy eyes moved over Crockta’s greatsword and Tiyo’s General.

Then he asked, “Did you come from the south?”

It was a voice that was as tough as iron. Crockta nodded.

“Yes. I am called Crockta. It is nice to see you. Stay alive.”

Crockta greeted politely.

The Kapur warriors behind the chief murmured at his answer. The Kapur chief’s eyes narrowed. He stomped the ground.

Kuuong!

Everyone became silent. The Kapur chief laughed at Crockta and Tiyo and declared,

“Kneel.”

"I refuse," Crockta answered bluntly. There was no hesitation in the answer, which caused Tiyo to laugh.

The face of the Kapur chief reddened. Then he yelled in a threatening manner, “Kuwaaaaaaaaaack!”

The Kapur Clan orcs trembled. The chief looked around with ferocious eyes. The tribe members avoided his gaze. He lifted the big axe that was leaning against the tribe chief's chair.

“I am Kapur, the Kapur Tribe’s chief! This is your final warning. Kneel down!” He screamed with red eyes towards Crockta.

It felt like he was going to run out right now.

'Inexperienced warriors reveal their emotions on their faces.'

The words that Hoyt told him in the past popped into his head. It was as he said. Now that the chief had been insulted in front of his tribe members, he needed to show off his power and regain his authority. It was as good as displaying his weaknesses.

It was a waste to even call him an inexperienced warrior. He was no different from the monsters that the orcs handled. Crockta felt ashamed as an orc.

Crockta spoke again, "I refuse, Kapur."

“You!”

The moment that Kapur was about to run out with his axe.

Crockta roared. It was the skill, Army Crushing Roar. The battle shout that emanated physical force tore through the sky of the north.

[illegible]

The atmosphere shook while the Kapur orcs were pushed back. In the front, the Kapur chief blocked his ears and took a few steps back. He dropped the axe. Once Crockta's shouting stopped, a dead silence fell over the tribe.

"...Gulp."

Someone gulped loudly. Kapur regained his spirit and hurriedly raised his axe again. Then he tried to imitate Crockta's shouting. But he couldn't speak and just gasped for breath.

"Kapur, I have no intention of fighting you," Crockta said.

Kapur's face distorted. "That isn't up to you to decide! Die!"

He charged with his axe. The other orc was much larger so a shadow covered Crockta for a moment. However, Crockta remained still. He was grasping the movements of the opponent.

He had experienced a great number of fights in Elder Lord. The enemies he met weren't any weaker than orcs. Even if he just remembered the behemoth, how many times had he almost died under its terrible feet? Then he had fought with the great hunter Shakan.

An axe swung randomly wouldn't be able to harm him. The axe descended in a straight path. Crockta stepped back. Kapur used the recoil to swing the axe from the other side. At that moment, Crockta swung his greatsword.

Kakang!

The axe didn't break but Kapur's hand bounced back from the reaction. He stiffened from the pain. Crockta jumped up and kicked his face.

"Keuak!"

Kapur collapsed. He rolled on the ground before getting to his feet.

Then he looked around again with ferocious eyes. The tribesmen watching the fight avoided his gaze again. Crockta's eyes sunk. He was able to see how the orc called Kapur usually acted.

Respect could never be gained through force.

Crockta advanced. Kapur fell back until his heel touched the chief's chair. There was no room to back down. Kapur rushed again. He was still the chief of an orc tribe. He jumped towards Crockta with a fearsome momentum.

"Aaaack!"

He swung the axe down vertically. Crockta turned around and avoided the attack. Ogre Slayer gained some rotating power. Kapur was unable to escape and receive the greatsword with his body.

"Kaaack!"

He was cut from under to armpits to his hips. Blood poured out. Kapur lowered the axe and grabbed his wound. He leaned over and gasped, "T-This guy...!"

He swallowed back the pain and moved the axe to the hand of his good side, but slipped on all of the blood. Kapur fell and started stuttering. "T-This..."

Crockta held his knee to Kapur's temple. Kapur started screaming from shock. Crockta looked around. The Kapur tribesmen were watching with fearful eyes.

"Unbelievable..."

The bodies of the warriors waiting behind the chief flinched. They were conflicted about whether to run out or not. Crockta turned his head.

"Once again, I have no intention of fighting you."

The stunned Kapur's body started twitching. It seemed like he was about to recover his spirit. Crockta kicked his head. Relentless kicking! Kapur's tusk was broken and he was stunned again.

Crockta looked down at the fallen Kapur. Then he gazed at the Kapur warriors avoided his eyes.

"Your words and deeds don't match *dot...*" Tiyo said.

Crockta shrugged. Crockta pointed to the Kapur warriors who originally brought them

here. They were looking at each other with amazement. "Aren't you the ones who called us here as guests?"

"T-That..."

"I just wanted to rest and talk here."

They became embarrassed at Crockta's words. They hadn't realized that he could overcome this tribe's chief. "T-Then..."

Tiyo shouted at them, "I'm hungry *dot!*"

Then another Kapur warrior came out. It seemed like he was the leader when there was no chief. "I understand. Shelter and food. Follow me."

Thus, Crockta and Tiyo became guests of the Kapur tribe after defeating their chief.



The Kapur Tribe had finally welcomed guests after a long time. Crockta didn't know if they were welcoming or terrified, but he accepted it.

"Is Kapur okay?" Crockta asked.

Rakuta, the warrior treating Crockta, replied, "He is recovering."

The warrior was calm, unlike the other orcs he met in the north. He served Crockta directly. It seemed like he wanted to hear about the south from Crockta. Crockta swallowed the meat. It was a little tough but it had the flavor of the south. It was the first time he tasted meat like this.

"You want to go to the Temple of the Fallen God?"

"That's right."

"I don't know why you would want to go to those ruins but it won't be easy."

Crockta stared at him.

"That is the realm of humans and dark elves. You will be attacked."

The relationship between species was bad on the continent where he lived, but they didn't attack other species out of the blue. But the north was different. According to Rakuta, the different species clashed and fought with each other. There were even cases where the same species were divided in two.

"Can you explain about the North?"

"The North..."

Crockta felt his head hurt at the description.

This was the outskirts of the northern wilderness. If he went a little further up, the real orc area would appear.

Several tribes were gathered around the Great Clan's chieftain. The tribes led by the clan chief were militant, going around butchering, plundering and slaughtering. They were always hoping for war and provoking other species in the north.

The slavery that was forbidden on the continent was active here. The north was more narrow than the rest of the continent, but there were many conflicts with various species.

"I get it."

Then Tiyo's voice could be heard from outside the tent. "So I just lifted my gun and fired *dot!* Then the big monster started talking *dot!* I'm surprisedddd~ My 'General' fired relentlessly at his eyes and pabababat!"

"Wow."

"Amazing!"

Due to being a small gnome and carrying a magic rifle from the continent, Tiyo attracted the attention of young orcs. Tiyo was telling them a story. Tiyo poked his head through the entrance of the tent.

"Crockta! Come out and tell the story! This is why I am a wonderful gnome!"

Crockta laughed.

At that moment, one orc went past Tiyo and entered the tent. He nervously said to Rakuta, "Rakuta, there is trouble."

Then he looked at Crockta. He was afraid of Crockta, who had knocked down their chief.

"What's going on?"

"All of a sudden, a messenger has come from the great clan chief. Today..."

Rakuta frowned. Crockta didn't know what he was talking about. Rakuta explained.

"Like I said, there is a great clan chief. Originally he wasn't involved in this area, but the Kapur chief wanted to become a sub-tribe under his control. We recently sent a tribute and the clan chief said there would be an answer soon..."

He thought about something.

"Please stay here. Your friend as well. You should absolutely not leave this place."

Then he left the tent. Tiyo entered the tent, lamenting, "Ah, I was interrupted at the important part *dot!*"

Crockta smiled and placed more meat in his mouth.



Hammerchwi looked around the Kapur tribe on a caruk.

It was a desolate land.

"Sending me to this place..."

He was an old orc warrior. He was a warrior who took down dark elves in his youth, but now his body wasn't the same. However, his hammer missed the battlefield. He still had enough strength to trample his enemies.

'It can't be helped.'

The new clan chieftain didn't like him. It couldn't be helped. Young people always

found the advice of the elderly uncomfortable. Especially someone holding power at a young age. So he kept sending Hammerchwi to different places.

He met with various tribe chiefs who wanted to go under the great clan chief, and now he came to this small tribe that was near the wall of darkness. But the atmosphere was weird. The tribe was strangely messy. There were blood stains in the central lot where people would gather. Hammerchwi got down from his caruk.

He discovered something on the ground. An orc's broken tusk.

"Hrmm..."

His eyes narrowed. Then he asked one of the Kapur tribesmen serving him.

"What happened?"

"Ah, nothing."

However, there were signs of panic. Hammerchwi smiled.

"Where is the chief?"

"He should be coming soon."

A large tribe warrior standing behind Hammerchwi opened his mouth.

"Don't make Hammerchwi wait for any longer," someone said in a desolate voice. The Kapur orcs froze.

Ten great tribe warriors were escorting Hammerchwi. They had steel weapons and high-quality armor that couldn't be seen in the wilderness around here. They weren't like the small tribe who couldn't make weapons and had to rob other species.

"There is no need to threaten them. I have a lot of time," Hammerchwi scolded.

"I understand." The warrior bowed his head.

Then Kapur hurriedly came out of his tent. He was a big orc that could match the size of the great clan chief. He was big even in comparison to the clan warriors. However, his movements were strange.

Hammerchwi narrowed his eyes. There were cloths wrapped around the orc's body. They were soaked with blood. The swollen face wasn't the end of it, though.

"....."

The tusks protruding from his mouth were broken.

"How interesting," Hammerchwi laughed.

Kapur approached and bowed his head. "You came a long way. I am Kapur."

It was a totally different attitude from how he treated his tribesmen. Hammerchwi confirmed the bloodstains on Kapur's side.

"What happened?"

"Nothing! Nothing happened."

"No?"

Hammerchwi bent his knees and looked at the face of Kapur who was still bowing. He flinched.

"Tell me what happened."

"Nothing happened..."

"Are you lying to me right now?"

"....."

Kapur rolled his eyes. Then he said, "Actually, something did happen."

"Describe it."

"An orc suddenly came and threatened us. I fought him but he was holding a weird weapon and I couldn't resist. He said he wanted to kill me and become the chief of this place."

Hammerchwi touched his chin. "Hrmm..."

“He didn’t even care that the great clan chieftain is behind me. Please defeat him!”

Hammerchwi nodded. He didn’t know the exact matter but there were two certain facts.

One. This chief lost to someone. Two. The orc was stronger than the chief.

“Interesting.” Hammerchwi stood up. It had been a tedious task but suddenly something different had happened. Hammerchwi said as he looked around the Kapur tribe. “So where is this orc?”

He glared fiercely at the Kapur tribe members. They pointed to a tent. Kapur spoke in an earnest tone to Hammerchwi. “That tent over there.”

Hammerchwi nodded.

“I will see him.”

He walked towards the tent. The inside of the tent wasn’t visible because the entrance was closed.

“Be careful! He is big, has a terrible belt and tattoos all over his body!”

A person who could knock out the over sized Kapur chief wasn’t normal.

Hammerchwi’s mouth rose. Would this fearsome orc entertain him? Excitement at the battle in front of him filled his whole body. The orcs in the outskirts weren’t properly trained but there were still those who showed a rough wildness. This guy was probably one of them.

He led the other clan warriors into the tent. Then Hammerchwi finally saw the opponent.

There.

“Who are you?” A cute little gnome cried out.

CHAPTER 74

GREAT CLAN (1)

Hammerchwi was stunned by the unexpected sight.

The gnome asked with a fierce expression, "I said, who are you? At least knock before opening the door *dot!*"

Hammerchwi didn't know how to react to the little gnome. He was a veteran who destroyed his enemies, not an old man who dealt with children. Instead, a clan warrior standing behind him spoke, "If you don't want to die, shut your mouth, kid."

"What?" The gnome stepped forward. "Hey, just because you are big orcs doesn't mean that..."

"I told you to shut your mouth, kid."

Sparks flew as they locked gazes.

"I suppose I should make you come to your senses *dot.*"

"I should be the one saying that," retorted the orc.

As they both growled at each other, the gnome prepared to point at the orc warrior with the rifle on his back. Then somebody sitting in a corner of the tent stood up. They hadn't noticed him due to the gnome, but once he moved, a large bulk filled the tent. An orc with numerous tattoos and blood vessels showing on his green skin.

Hammerchwi's eyes widened. There were still people who received such tattoos.

"What is this?"

Hammerchwi felt his heart beating with an unknown feeling as he stared into those calm eyes. This person wasn't normal. Hammerchwi's mouth unconsciously went up. "Are you the one who hurt the Kapur chief?"

"Yes," he answered without hesitation.

“For what reason...?”

“Let’s go out and talk.” The orc interrupted. The warriors behind him huffed but Hammerchwi didn’t care.

“Understood.”

Orc warriors should face each other under the sun. If he truly wanted to know someone, he shouldn’t accuse them in a tent.

“Step back now.”

Hammerchwi opened a path among the large clan warriors.

The orc and gnome left the tent. The orc’s magnificent appearance was revealed. Despite being smaller than the Kapur chief, his tough muscles swelled throughout his body. A greatsword was smoothly carried on his back.

He was a man who had experienced many battles. His face was casual despite facing Hammerchwi and the great clan warriors. Hammerchwi stared into his eyes and asked.

“Now, I want to ask. The Kapur chief...”

“It is me.” He once again interrupted Hammerchwi, “I am the orc warrior, Crockta. Stay alive.”

Then he extended a fist towards Hammerchwi.

“.....!”

“You dare!” One of the clan warriors was offended by the action and raised his weapon. “This bastard! Talking nonsense to Hammerchwi!”

He was about to run out straight away. However, Hammerchwi restrained him.

“...Hammerchwi?”

Hammerchwi didn’t answer. He was looking at the young orc in front of him with a strange expression. It was a disbelieving look. Hammerchwi burst out laughing,

“Kuhahahahahat!”

His laughter resonated through the Kapur Tribe. The great clan warriors looked at him with confusion. Hammerchwi touched the warrior’s shoulder and gestured for him to step back.

“Hahahahat! Yes, yes. I should.” Hammerchwi took one step and struck his fist against the orc’s and said, “I am Hammerchwi, the ambassador for the Great Clan Chief who leads the Great Clan, the one who conveys the words of the great chieftain! I am alive!”

It was a saying that a warrior should say to another warrior they encountered! It was a natural story. Orcs didn’t change their attitude just because they had a higher status and led many subordinates. All orc warriors were the same. It was something that Hammerchwi had forgotten.

And that was to stay alive. How long had it been since he heard such an old-fashioned greeting?

The two orcs’ eyes met. They bumped each other’s fist.

“Now, I will ask again. Did you hurt the Kapur chief?”

“Yes.”

“What were your intentions?”

“He attacked me first, so I needed to defend myself.”

“Hrmm.”

Look at this.

Hammerchwi glanced at the distant Kapur. He shook his head with a wronged expression.

Kapur was an orc who ruled over this wild region because he was larger and more powerful than the other orcs. Even though it was a land that contained nothing, there was no enemy in the area who could beat him. Once the proper equipment was worn, he could even fight one of the great clan warriors.

To make Kapur act so cowardly, how bad was this orc?

Hammerchwi said with a smile, "Kapur says that you attacked in a cowardly manner to become the chief here."

Crockta grinned as he responde, "That is a lie."

"Well, these are just words, so I don't know who is right or wrong." Hammerchwi stroked his chin like he was thinking. "Then let me see... I can't tell who is right... unless..."

Then he laughed. It was a thrilled expression that didn't fit the wrinkled face. "Why don't we settle this with a duel between orcs?"

He touched the large hammer on his back. Like his name, Hammerchwi was a warrior wielding a battle hammer.

"Kapur isn't in a state to fight so I will be your opponent."

It was far-fetched. Everyone knew that he just wanted a reason to compete. Crockta burst out laughing.

The warriors behind Hammerchwi stopped him. "That won't work."

"It is too much for Hammerchwi to come out."

"Please."

Hammerchwi frowned. "Are you disregarding me because I am old?"

"Absolutely not. How could we think that? But the great chief wouldn't allow this."

"You can keep it a secret from the great chief."

"I can't..."

"Aish." Hammerchwi shrugged. "It will leak. Yes, you are more loyal to the great chief."

"Hammerchwi!"

“It is a joke.”

Hammerchwi spoke to Crockta. “Unfortunately, it seems like I won’t be able to come out. These guys are like people minding a child. They are disregarding me because I am old.”

“I think it is more about respect than disregard.”

“Kulkulkul, that is nice to hear.” Hammerchwi grabbed the shoulder of the great clan warrior Jeulta standing behind him, “Instead, this guy will play. He is the best among them. Say hello, Jeulta.”

Jeulta had an unwilling expression but he obeyed Hammerchwi and greeted Crockta... It was the very orc who first walked into the tent and started a battle of nerves with Tiyo.

“I am the Great Clan warrior, Jeulta.”

“I am Crockta.”

Hammerchwi clapped loudly. “Well, Crockta, do you have any complaints?”

“It seems like there is no choice.” Crockta laughed bitterly as he watched the clan warriors staring at him from behind Hammerchwi.

Tiyo poked Crockta’s thigh. “Is this okay? That orc looks very tough *dot*.”

“Do you think I will lose, Tiyo?”

Tiyo shook his head. “No, won’t that face become uglier after being beaten by Crockta *dot*?”

Crockta laughed at his words. Hammerchwi was also smiling.

Jeulta’s mouth distorted. “You... it is your turn next, Kid.”

“Yes, Crockta will squash your face and I will roll it out again *dot*. Don’t worry, I’ll be sure to give you good slaps with my palms!”

Tiyo’s words caused the warriors to laugh. Jeulta shook his head with a frown and

asked Crockta, "Does you friend always have no fear?"

"He is a feisty friend."

Jeulta's weapons were twin axes. As he held the two axes, Crockta also pulled out Ogre Slayer from his back.

"And there is nothing to be scared about," Crockta said with a smile.

Jeulta laughed. "The same type of people will gather together. Okay."

Hammerchwi and the other tribe warriors retreated. A space for the two people was created. The Kapur Tribe also gathered to see the duel that was suddenly occurring. Kapur looked nervous. He had made up a cowardly lie. If this orc was acknowledged by the clan warriors, then his plight would fall even further. He was cheering for Jeulta.

Crockta and Jeulta got into their stances. Then the two of them met.

The sound of metal clashing rang through the Kapur tribe. The sound of fighting soon became intense.

Kakakang!

The weapons of the two people clashed against each other. Sparks flew out. Crockta wielded his greatsword. Jeulta crossed both axes and blocked it. It became a struggle of power between them. The veins on both people's faces were bulging.

"What... strength...!"

Normally, Jeulta would've used the advantage of his twin weapons to attack the enemy's gaps, but the attacks of this strange orc were different. Every strike made him feel like his body was going to be cut in half.

Furthermore, every time their eyes met during the fight, the orc would grin.

Jeulta's pride was scratched, causing him to scream, "Kuaaaaaaack!"

It was a frightening roar. It was the battle cry of the warrior Jeulta, who enemies feared on the battlefield! Jeulta gathered his strength and aimed at Crockta. But it was blocked by the greatsword.

“Kuoh!”

The battle continued but Jeulta started to be suppressed. He noticed that the opponent wasn't ending the fight in order to gauge his power. He wanted to know the power of the warriors from the Great Clan. The opponent had that much room to think.

“You dare!”

Jeulta was furious. He started an attack that ignored his body. One of them, either himself or his opponent, would be injured. He tried to make a decisive move. And it was his two axes that were blown away.

“.....”

The end of the greatsword was touching his neck. It was his defeat.

The Kapur Clan orcs watching the duel clapped.

“It was a great match.”

“Breathtaking.”

However, the faces of Hammerchwi and the clan warriors were frozen.

They understood that it wasn't a breathtaking match. Crockta had been playing with Jeulta. He could've finished it at any time, but he was checking Jeulta's skill, then he lightly restrained Jeulta's last attack.

Jeulta was the leader of the warriors who followed Hammerchwi and a fierce powerhouse. In other words, the young orc's skills were close to the great warrior Hammerchwi.

Clap. Clap. Clap.

Hammerchwi started to clap.

“Great.” Hammerchwi moved forward and patted Jeulta on the head, gesturing for him to return. “It is a fighting style that is hard to see in orcs these days. Sophisticated techniques. Who did you learn it from?”

“A great warrior.”

“A great warrior...” Hammerchwi laughed once again.

He liked it.

He thought inwardly. It was an age where no one called themselves a great warrior. Warriors were strong, so killing was considered more of a virtue. This land of orcs was trying to become strong rather than great.

Where had this warrior come from?

“I’m curious. Where do you come from?”

Crockta replied.



A feast was held in the Kapur tribe. It was to entertain Hammerchwi and the warriors from the Great Clan.

A feast was now set up in the vacant lot where the fighting had taken place. To this end, a few caruks died. The orcs sat around a large fire, eating meat and drinking alcohol.

“It is a really amazing place.”

Hammerchwi said to Crockta who was sitting opposite him.

At first, he thought it was a joke when Crockta said he came from the south. But he started to believe after more facts were shared. A land where orcs still followed the laws of the warriors. Different species lived together without any fighting. It felt like paradise.

“You want to find the Temple of the Fallen God.”

“Yes.”

“Um...”

Hammerchwi touched his chin. That wasn't in an orc area. There would be fights if he wanted to go there. But there was no need to avoid conflicts.

"Crockta."

"Yes."

"Will you become a warrior of the Great Clan?"

The other warriors stopped and listened to the proposal.

Crockta had enough skills to be qualified. No, it was more than that. Given the tendency of the great chief to treat those who were stronger well, Crockta could have a position higher than a general warrior. It would also be nice to have another strong warrior become a colleague.

Despite the fight before, their enemies weren't orcs but the wicked humans and dark elves.

"If you become a warrior of the Great Clan, you can go to the Temple of the Fallen God."

"Tell me how."

Hammerchwi laughed while touching his hammer. "War."

He was still a militant orc of the north. "After wiping out all the dark elves, you can easily go to the Temple of the Fallen God."

At the end of Hammerchwi's words, the clan warriors raised their cups.

"To the Great Clan!"

"To orcs!"

Then they simultaneously drank from their cups. The Kapur orcs also drank the alcohol.

"The Great Clan will soon go to war. This is the decision of the great chief. Crockta, you can trample them more easily if you go with us. You can go anywhere you want in the north."

His voice was serious. He truly hoped for Crockta to join them. Crockta was a great fighter. He was convinced that Crockta would become more than a general warrior. And maybe... He could become an even greater presence than that.

“I will think about it. I am not alone.”

Crockta pointed somewhere. A small gnome was drunkenly firing magic bullets into the air. The young orcs around him cheered. He was always a lively person.

Tiyo started to sing.

“We protect our beautiful Quantes~ Gnome Garrison~ live with ~ today ~! Bathe in the blood of creatures ~!”

The song of the Quantes’ Gnome Garrison. The young orcs awkwardly sang along. Tiyo fired colourful magic power into the air once again.

“Bah!” The warrior Jeulta scoffed and stood up. He pointed to Tiyo and declared. “The song of a kid is terrible!”

“What are you saying *dot!*”

“Listen carefully, Kid! A real man’s song is like this!” Then he started to shout. “Look at the orcs~! Pillage ~! Finish up~! Spread your two legs~!”

It was the song of the northern orcs. It was a tough but powerful sound!

However, it was lacking. It was ambitious but too insufficient from Crockta’s viewpoint.

“Hah...”

These guys in the north didn’t know how to be real warriors. Crockta felt a strong sense of purpose and stood up. It was to spread the voice of a real warrior! He would show this desolate land what a real warrior’s song was!

He used Army Crushing Roar to spread his lyrics further.

“We are orcs! The mighty orcs————!”

CHAPTER 75

GREAT CLAN (2)

“It is okay?” Crockta asked.

Rakuta, the warrior from the Kapur Tribe nodded. Crockta and Tiyo’s destination was the Forest of the Fallen God. They couldn’t stay here at the Kapur Tribe, as its chief was still the big orc, Kapur.

“I will defend this tribe with my own power.”

Everyone now knew that Kapur was an oppressive chief who would trouble the tribe. Despite this, they couldn’t deny that Kapur was the chief of this place because he was the strongest. The orc, Rakuta, endured all of that.

“You might be able to kill Kapur. But it isn’t true freedom.”

Crockta nodded. It would just be a half-ending for the tribe if Crockta defeated Kapur for them.

The drunk Rakuta had confessed to Crockta at the end of the feast, saying that he would become stronger and beat Kapur, thus making the Kapur tribe more prosperous. That was his goal.

Crockta felt that it was both commendable and sad.

Crockta had received the teachings of great people since his apprenticeship. Lenox, Hoyt, Tashaquil, Grant, Gulda, and Antuak. All of them were like lanterns that lit his way forth. The orcs on the continent kept their great spirit without losing the pride of a warrior.

But this place, the North, was different. It was a desolate landscape.

Crockta wanted to help out a little bit. But what could he do?

“Crockta, how can I become as strong as you?” Rakuta asked.

Crockta laughed. There were times when he felt like the orc wielding his weapon in Orcrox's training grounds. At that time, he was just an apprentice warrior who was criticized by Lenox.

Now someone was asking him how to become strong. What made him strong?

He thought about it. From the first mutant hunting at Orcrox to the recent behemoth hunting. There were many fights, and in every struggle, there was always a moment when he wanted to give up.

But he endured it. Sometimes alone, and sometimes with colleagues.

Crockta replied, "My indomitable will!"

That was the word. All of the great warriors he knew had such spirit. They gave all of themselves without giving up.

"Indomitable will." Rakuta nodded, a smile blooming on his face. It seemed like he had wanted someone to say something like that to him.

"Thank you."

"Don't doubt yourself."

Crockta extended his fist. Rakuta was unfamiliar with the old greeting, but he still laughed and bumped fists with Crockta.

Thus, Crockta left the Kapur Tribe with Hammerchwi and the warriors of the Great Clan. Kapur said goodbye to Hammerchwi with a bow. There was a mixture of fear and hostility in his eyes when he looked at Crockta.

They headed North. Hammerchwi was returning to the Great Clan while Crockta headed to the dark elves area where the Temple of the Fallen God was located. The proposal to join the clan was put on hold. He needed to know more about the situation in the North.

"Where is my father...?" Tiyo muttered, not particularly in a sad tone. He seemed more concerned with exploring the North than about finding his father.

Tiyo hummed and spoke again, "He is probably alive and well somewhere *dot*."

Jeulta interrupted, "Gnomes often appear in the mountain ranges near the human areas, so he might be somewhere there."

"Hoh... are you acting friendly now?"

"I-I'm just saying. Little guy!"

"Don't call me that *dot*."

"Bah."

Jeulta moved ahead on his caruk. Tiyo smiled.

The two of them seemed to enjoy arguing.

They rode the caruks through the wilderness. The weather began to change as soon as they got away from the wall of darkness separating the continent and the North. Gradually, plants grew and a green landscape appeared.

"This area isn't an area, but a deserted land." Hammerchwi explained, "It is a place where those who don't belong to their own species live."

"Orcs and dark elves?"

"That's right. There are also gnomes and humans."

It was like the fugitives who built Anail.

Jeremy suddenly popped into his head. Was he still under Derek or had he been attacked by Derek? He wasn't a person for Crockta to worry about. He was a man who could pioneer his own destiny.

Suddenly, the caruks stopped.

"Gruruk!"

Crockta patted the caruk's head. Crockta and Tiyo had received their own caruks. Unlike their appearance, it was easy for beginners to ride them.

"There's someone ahead!" The clan warrior in the lead shouted.

A group was standing in the distance. Hammerchwi nodded and the warrior kicked his caruk.

"I will check!" He moved quickly and soon approached the unknown group.

"Is it okay for him to go alone?"

"There is no one who would mess with warriors of the Great Clan. Attacking us means becoming the enemy of the Great Clan." Hammerchwi explained. He was intentionally trying to entice Crockta by emphasizing the greatness of the clan. Crockta grinned.

"Huhut! Look at this! My sense of balance!"

Tiyo was bored while on standby so he climbed onto the caruk's horns and started balancing. The caruk seemed to like Tiyo as it raised its head. Tiyo started his signature colorful magic power show.

"This is a gnome *dot!*"

Jeulta felt an unknown motivation as he watched. "I-I can do it as well!"

Jeulta tried to balance on the caruk's head but it was unable to withstand his weight and threw him off. Jeulta fell to the ground.

Tiyo looked down on him from the caruk's horns. "Hahahahat! If you were trying to make me laugh then it is a success *dot!*"

"Ugh..."

The other clan warriors shook their heads.

"Hrmm..." Hammerchwi was watching the scene when he suddenly moved.

Crockta stopped him and said, "Don't follow in their footsteps."

"Hum hum. I was just shaking." But he kept on glancing at his caruk's horns. It seemed like he truly wanted to try.

Soon the clan warrior came back. He spoke to Hammerchwi, "All of them are slave traders."

“I see.”

Hammerchwi’s eyes slightly distorted.

Crockta spoke up. “Did you say slave traders?”

“.....”

On the continent, slave trading was taboo. There was the incident in Arnin but those were crimes that happened in the shadows. If slave trading was discovered then all species and cities would become hostile to them, forming alliances to repel the slave trading.

But the North was different.

“Just go.” Hammerchwi directed his caruk. Crockta looked at his back with disappointment. He thought that Hammerchwi was different from the Northern orcs, but he still followed the great chieftain.

“Bah, slavery, how barbaric *dot!*” Tiyo cried out from where he was listening.

The eyebrows of the warriors twitched. Hammerchwi raised his hand and calmed the warriors. The clan warriors scowled at Tiyo before driving their caruks forward.

Tiyo looked at Crockta with an expression showing he didn’t like it. Crockta nodded towards Tiyo.

They headed North and encountered the slave traders.

“Hello. Great Warrior Hammerchwi!”

The slave traders bowed as they already knew who Hammerchwi was after meeting the warrior. The slave traders said to the orcs, “Please tell us if you need anything. The warriors of the Great Clan can do anything.”

“No.”

Crockta’s face hardened as he followed from behind Hammerchwi.

These slave merchants weren’t just carrying slaves. They were directly hunting slaves.

A little further North, a burning village could be seen. Dark smoke was rising from it. The screams of men and women could be heard as they were captured by armed orcs and handed over to the slave traders here. They were then imprisoned in carriages driven by the slave traders.

The slaves cried out.

“This...!” Tiyo was about to cry out angrily when,

“——!”

A huge cry ripped through the air. The caruks were surprised. The warriors blocked their ears in pain. The slave traders were bleeding from the ears.

Hammerchwi looked at the source of the sound. It was Crockta.

“Do you know the meaning of the word I just shouted?”

Hammerchwi’s face stiffened. He knew. Countless orcs had already forgotten but the old orc warriors still remembered. At one time, this cry was heard everyone among the orcs. But times had changed. Now it sounded so strange to him. It was a cloudy memory from the distant past.

“...I know.”

“Then you know what I will do now.”

Hammerchwi sighed, “Is that really necessary?”

“I want to ask you that.” Crockta reached out and pointed to one place.

Miserable slaves were being dragged here. And those slaves...

They were orcs.

“Is that your path?”

Hammerchwi shook his head. He also wasn’t satisfied with the slaves. However, it couldn’t be helped. Slavery was one of the means of war that the great chieftain proclaimed.

“I don’t like it. However, this is the great chief’s law so we have to follow it. This is none of your business.”

Crockta laughed. Now he no longer felt respect towards Hammerchwi.

“Great Warrior Hammerchwi. You don’t deserve the name of a warrior.”

“What?” Hammerchwi’s face distorted. The clan warriors grabbed their weapons. “You are overdoing it! That is the law here, Crockta!”

Hammerchwi picked up his hammer. “You come from the peaceful south and don’t know anything. The North is a land where you will die if you can’t kill your opponents. Weak people are weeded out.”

Hammerchwi got down from his caruk and spat at Crockta. “Don’t force the laws of a weak land towards us.”

Crockta burst out laughing. He also got down from his caruk.

“How strange.” Crockta kept laughing. “You are the mistaken ones. It isn’t weak to do the right thing. You are mistaken if you think that unhesitatingly wielding your weapons towards a weaker opponent is called strength. The truth is, it is quite the opposite.”

“.....”

“I assure you, there are no orcs weaker than you on the continent.”

‘Ogre Slayer’ shone in the sun. Now all the clan warriors, including Hammerchwi, were pointing their weapons at Crockta.

Crockta actually felt more comfortable. He was lucky to study the laws of the warriors until Lenox. Doing what he believed freely, without disturbing anyone was the orc warrior that he knew. They weren’t afraid of being called cowardly or afraid to fight.

Crockta smiled and said. “Now, let me ask you one thing. Hammerchwi, are you living right now?”

“Get rid of those impractical old stories!”

Crockta once again smiled. He was a human who became an orc that practiced this old-fashioned nonsense. The warriors who gave their lives for him were his teachers.

These orcs here were so small compared to them. How poor was their pride that they would mindlessly follow the laws of the clan chief, without caring about right or wrong?

Tiyo said as he confronted them, "Crockta, let's finish this quickly. I'll give you 10 minutes *dot*."

It was a provocation that Crockta alone could deal with all of them! The clan warriors stepped forward in unison. Crockta raised Ogre Slayer and declared.

"Five minutes is enough."

Steam rose from his greatsword.



"Heok, heok... Everybody okay...?" Hammerchwi muttered.

The warriors of the Great Clan had collapsed on the red ground.

"Kuoooooh..." Jeulta barely managed to raise his body. His thigh was half cut off. He tried to reach out for Hammerchwi, only to fall down again with a moan.

"Crockta..." Hammerchwi muttered. The battle hammer he cared for had been completely shattered. It was a rare steel weapon that he received directly from the great chieftain. But it was completely broken by Crockta's swordsmanship. He was much better than Hammerchwi expected.

The difference in skills was evident.

"Kuock... you're okay."

Hammerchwi checked the status of the warriors. Crockta hadn't killed any of the warriors. He had left with his gnome friend without speaking any words of mercy.

"Shit..."

However, his mercy didn't extend to the slave traders. All the slave traders had one arm cut off. They had died from the shock. He released the captured slaves along with the gnome.

'Hammerchwi, are you living right now?'

Crockta's voice popped into his head. The question of being alive was an old orc greeting that no one remembered these days. Hammerchwi was aware of the implication of it.

Yes, he was aware.

"Maybe..."

He was badly defeated but he somehow didn't feel bad. He was an old warrior, a veteran with few days left to live. He thought it would be lucky if he survived until the end of the year. However, a warrior who could change the North had emerged.

Could it be that the change would begin today?

He wondered if he would spend the remaining days of his life watching the North change. The great chieftain was obviously strong. Hammerchwi had never seen such an overwhelming force. Even Crockta, who defeated all of them, couldn't be compared to the great chieftain.

But.

'Hammerchwi. Remember this.'

When Hammerchwi had been young, his grandfather was an old veteran. One day, his grandfather had called the young Hammerchwi and said.

'Orcs who remember this can be great. But an orc who forgets it will wander for life. So be sure to engrave it in you.'

Then he forgot it. He wasn't the only one. No one remembered it in the North. That word had died. But today, he heard it spoken in his ears. The roar that shook the ground brought back the childhood memory.

"Was I wandering...?"

Hammerchwi sighed. The warriors had regained their spirits and were standing up. Hammerchwi watched them and spoke 'it' out loud.

It somehow echoed in his heart.

“Bul’tar.”



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